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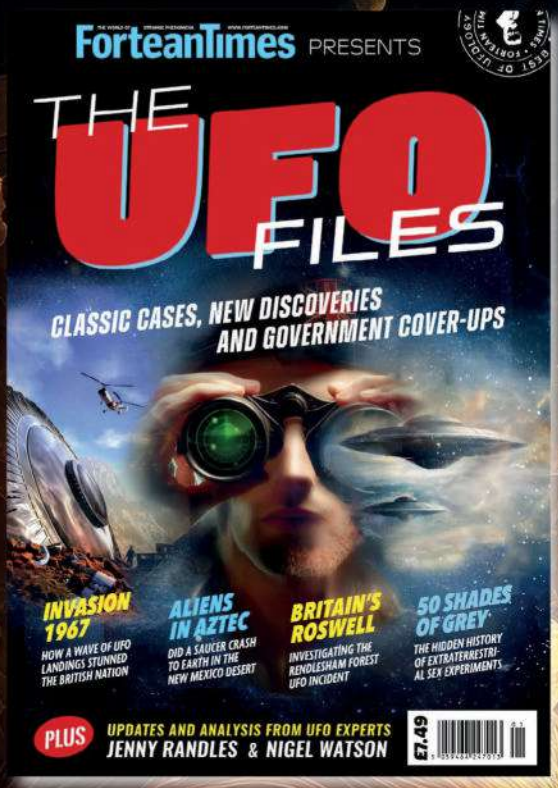

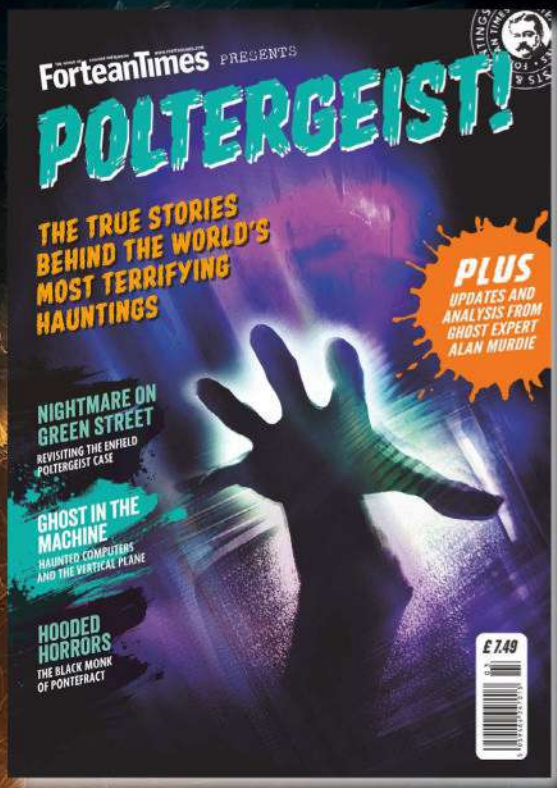

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ETIENNE GILFILLAN

ARTHUR LOWE PHOTO:
ITV / SHUTTERSTOCK

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EDITORIAL

CAPUCINE DESLOUIS

PUT THAT LIGHT OUT!

One of the joys of FT – for us, and, we hope, for readers – is that forteana's reach is sufficiently wide to encompass vast and vastly different swathes of human experience and activity: so we're tickled that while last month's cover star was rock 'n' roll legend Elvis Presley, this issue presented us with a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to feature the great British actor Arthur Lowe in the same spot. Another thing that sustains us is being surprised by things we were not previously aware of. While Lowe will forever be identified with his role as Captain Mainwaring in Jimmy Perry and David Croft's much-loved wartime sitcom *Dad's Army* (1968-1977) he had previously found fame as *Coronation Street*'s Leonard Swindley, a character sufficiently popular to warrant two spin-off series, the second of which – *Turn Out the Lights* – saw Swindley transformed into a paranormal investigator. This was news to us, as we had no memories of this short-lived and forgotten ITV offering – possibly because it was never repeated and all six episodes remain seemingly lost for ever. We hope readers enjoy Andrew T Smith's exercise in television archæology as much as we did – and if any readers do actually recall the programme, please send your memories to the FT letters page.

UNCANNY TALES

Neither lost nor forgotten is Danny Robins's phenomenally successful *Uncanny*, which in its various incarnations as a podcast, BBC series and travelling roadshow seems to be connecting with people across the country and revealing that there is a large, and often young, audience for all things weird, particularly tales of hauntings, poltergeists and associated spooky phenomena. Back in December 2024, the second UncannyCon took place at London's Royal Festival Hall, with a day of talks and events featuring guests ranging from *Uncanny* regulars Evelyn Hollow and Ciaran O'Keeffe to Reece Shearsmith, Deborah Hyde and FT regular Richard Freeman. The FT team were there in person, with your humble editor, art director (both pictured below) and news editor chatting with *Uncanny* fans – some of whom turned out to be regular readers or former readers – and handing out back issues and FT goodies to the uninitiated to help introduce them to the world's weirdest magazine. It was a most enjoyable day, even if running the FT stand meant we missed most of the events.

ERRATA

FT453:14: A last-minute design glitch as this issue went to press resulted in David Hambling's Science column ending mid-sentence and shorn of its conclusion (as a number of frustrated readers contacted us to point out). Here is the final paragraph in its entirety, as it should have appeared:

"In the fortean world, the research might tell us more about weird, hallucinatory experiences and how they relate to brain activity. It does not necessarily devalue them: prophetic visionaries and psychedelic explorers claim that altered brain states give them access to a deeper reality rather hallucinations. It might also pave the way for discovering what causes these experiences and, possibly, how they can be replicated to open doors into strange new worlds."

EXPAND YOUR MIND, REFINE YOUR WARDROBE
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ROSSANO BRAZZI
ELVIS PRESLEY
FORTEAN TIMES
LESLIE CHARTERIS
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"I HAVE ABSOLUTELY LOVED, FROM AN EARLY AGE, DRACULA AND VAMPIRES. OBVIOUSLY DEMONIC POWERS, BUT ALSO... CLOTHES! THEY GET TO BE SO DRAMATIC, AND SO SUAVE"
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A DIGEST OF THE WORLDWIDE WEIRD

STRANGE DAYS

CHRISTMAS CRACKERS

A round-up of seasonal stories and festive oddities from around the world

DRONE RECORD

While New Jersey was gripped by its plague of mystery drones (see pp.14-15), Texas drone display company Sky Elements was setting a world record for the "Longest Animation Performed by Drones" with its 30 minute Christmas aerial spectacular. Performed to a drive-in audience at the Birdville ISD Fine Arts/Athletics Complex in North Richland Hills, Texas, the show used 5,000 programmed drones synchronised to create an evolving sequence of images in the sky, beating a recently set Chinese record for a performance that used 2,500 drones. The show began with a gigantic, lifelike turkey, which spread its feathers and transformed into a giant snowman, then a gingerbread village, complete with festive lights and smoke, and, after a sequence of further transformations, ended with Santa Claus and his reindeer soaring across the sky and the message "Merry Christmas to all, and to all, a good flight!" *interestingengineering.com, 24 Dec 2024.*

SKY ELEMENTS

LEFT: The record-breaking display mounted by Sky Elements in the skies above North Richland Hills in Texas used 5,000 synchronised drones.

ARMS RACE

Over the Christmas period, classified ad platforms in Russia have been inundated with competing entrepreneurs trying to sell "Snowman Arms" at up to 5,300 roubles (£38) a pair. Described at "long lasting, strong, reliable and unique, the "arms" are just ordinary forked twigs straight from the tree. One ad reads: "We have a super offer for you: new, shiny, creative hands for your snowman! Build the best snowman in the area by New Year 2025! Your snowman will become a star, and your neighbours will definitely envy you! Don't let your snowman remain clumsy!" Other ads were also offering coal, buttons and carrots to accessorise your snowman at similar prices. *odditycentral.com, 17 Dec 2024.*

A gigantic, lifelike turkey transformed into a giant snowman

SANTA'S SARCOPHAGUS

The original Santa, Saint Nicholas, was Bishop of Myra in Turkey and died there in AD 343 (see **FT56:42-45, 309:34-39**). The Church of St Nicholas in the city (now known as Demre) was built in AD 520 on or near what is believed to be the saint's burial site, and excavations have been taking place since 1989 to investigate the area. Archæologists chose the 2024 Christmas season to announce that they have discovered a sarcophagus in the church's two-storey annex that they believe could contain St Nicholas himself. The 6.5-foot-long (2m) sarcophagus is constructed of local limestone and has a design that features a raised lid and pitched roof, consistent with others from the region in the time of St Nicholas. Fatma Findik of Hatay Mustafa Kemal University, who led the excavation, said: "Some sources suggest that St Nicholas was buried near the sacred area of the city of Myra. The fact that we have found a sarcophagus near the church, which is thought to house his tomb, may indicate that this is indeed the sacred area we have been searching for." *popularmechanics.com, 24 Dec 2024.*

SEASONAL RAMPAGE

Thomas Von Goetz, 34, left a trail of seasonal mayhem behind him during a rampage in St Mary's County, Maryland, on Christmas Eve. Starting in Holy Angels Catholic Church, he disrupted Mass by throwing an onion into the aisle and, as the sheriff's office put it, "disturbing the peace of the congregation". While being escorted off the premises by church members, he also pelted the congregants with tangerines. Von Goetz turned up again at midnight mass at St Francis Xavier Catholic Church in Leonardtown, where he poured whiskey into the holy water and attacked parishioners with the bottle as they tried to evict him. Members of the congregation managed to pin Von Goetz down until deputies arrived, and he was taken to hospital for medical evaluation before being charged with assault, disorderly conduct, threat of mass violence and defacing religious property. *wtop.com, 26 Dec 2024.*

MAGIC MONEY TREE

The folklore of Britain's coin trees

PAGE 12

LIGHTS IN THE SKY

Mapping the great drone panic

PAGE 14

YEAR OF THE FOGHORN

The People's Day of Death 2024

PAGE 24

KIRA AUSTIN-YOUNG / THREADS

ABOVE LEFT: The 'biblically accurate' angel atop the Christmas tree of Rev Kira Austin-Young and Michael Schupbach. **ABOVE RIGHT:** Aaron Johnson and his drinking mates disguised as a stocking full of chocolate treats. **BELOW:** A festive Goldie the Gritter.

ANGELIC MONSTERS

Stuck at home during the pandemic, the Reverend Kira Austin-Young and her puppet-maker husband, Michael Schupbach, from San Francisco in California, decided to replace the humanoid angel atop their Christmas tree with something more biblically accurate, sparking a viral trend that has spread over subsequent Christmases. They based their creation on descriptions of angels in the Book of Revelation and some of the books of the prophets in the Old Testament. "Some of them have six wings with eyes covering the wings," said Austin-Young. "Others have multiple animal heads. I think one of the delightful things about the Bible and the Scripture is just kind of how bizarre and just how kind of out there it can be." Theologian Esther Hamori, author of *God's Monsters: Vengeful Spirits, Deadly Angels, Hybrid Creatures, and Divine Hitmen of the Bible,* agrees, saying: "The biblical heavens are filled with weird, frightening figures. In the Bible, God has an entourage of monsters." *[AP] 22 Dec 2024.*

THE KNITTY GRITTY

A group of knitters from the award winning Ripon Community Poppy Project revealed the fruits of 4,500 hours of their work in December – a 32ft by 28ft (10m x 8.5m) Christmas jumper for Goldie the Gritter, complete with hat and stocking. Inspired by a challenge from local gritter manufacturers Econ Engineering, 35 volunteers created the huge jumper over 12 months, using 1,130 balls of wool. Group member Stuart Martin said, "We didn't realise it was going to be this big!" After the unveiling, the jumper-clad gritter set out on a 900-mile tour of the UK, visiting schools to teach children about road safety and winter maintenance. *BBC News, 3 Dec 2024.*

RIPON COMMUNITY POPPY PROJECT

NUTTY SELECTION

A group of men from Dublin went well beyond the usual Christmas jumpers when choosing their outfits for their seasonal pub crawl. The 12 men, two of whom had come from Australia to take part, prepared for the annual Dublin "12 Pubs of Christmas" event by dressing as chocolate bars, including a Dairy Milk, a Flake and a Curly Wurly, to make up a Cadburys' Christmas stocking. "Every year we have a different theme. Last year we went as the Nativity and we didn't think we could top that this year and then we came up with this," said organiser Aaron Johnston, 31. "My friend Craig made all the costumes by hand. We all chipped in with a few quid for him to get the material, but it must've taken him a long time to make". Posted on Facebook, photos of the gang swiftly went viral, earning over 350,000 likes. *dailymail.co.uk, 22 Dec 2014.*

EXTRA! EXTRA!

FT'S FAVOURITE HEADLINES FROM AROUND THE WORLD

DEMON TO LIVE OLYMPIC DREAM

(Queensland) Courier-Mail, 27 June 2024.

Van driver who failed to pay M50 toll 666 times among 13 toll dodgers fined a total of €154K

irishexaminer.com, 20 May 2024

'MUMMIFIED PIG' AT DERELICT KWIK SAVE THAT HAS BECOME ANTISOCIAL HOTSPOT

Chronicle Live, 15 Feb 2024.

Victor Adeboyejo: Bolton Wanderers striker injured after 'hefty sneeze'

news.sky.com, 6 Sept 2024.

SHOOTER AGREES TO DONATE BRAIN

Gold Coast Bulletin, 15 July 2024.

SIDELINES

HAIR FARMING

The increasingly hardline Taliban regime in Afghanistan has made it illegal for soldiers to be clean shaven, court martialling or dismissing any who refuse, or are not able, to grow a beard. All soldiers must now comply with Islamic law and have a beard "at least the length of a fist". They are not the first army to have mandatory facial hair; between 1860 and 1916 all British soldiers were required to have a moustache, again with penalties for being clean shaven. *Irish Independent, 28 Aug 2024.*

SWEAR ME A RIVER

Although it has been possible to swear a pagan oath in court since 2006, Paul Powlesland made legal history at Snaresbrook Crown Court in east London when he became the first juror in history to swear a legal oath on a river. Instead of being sworn in on a holy book or by making an affirmation, Powlesland took a vial of water from the River Roding out of his pocket and asked to swear on that. "I told [the judge] the river was effectively my god, and that I hold the river to be sacred," he said, and on that basis the judge allowed him to take the oath on it. *BBC News, 2 Aug 2024.*

HOT DOG

Firefighters in Tulsa, Oklahoma, attending an apartment fire, discovered it had been caused by a labrador chewing on a lithium-ion battery charger. Surveillance video from the apartment shows the dog nonchalantly gnawing the device on a mattress until it starts to spout flames. He then sits and watches quizzically as the fire takes hold of the building before finally fleeing with other pets through a dog door. *editions.cnn.com, 7 Aug 2024.*

SPIRITS, GODS, DEMONS

Supernatural goings-on around the world

CABINET SECRETARIAT OF THE REPUBLIC OF INDONESIA

ABOVE: President Joko Widodo leading the Kendi Nusantara ritual to appease local spirits. **BELOW:** A severed chicken head found in Jamaica Bay, Queens.

NUSANTARA SPIRIT WAR

Indonesia is in the process of relocating its capital to the province of Kalimantan on Borneo island, creating the new city of Nusantara. The move, though, is being hampered by fears of *santet*, a traditional Indonesian practice involving spells, charms, and the invocation of supernatural forces to harm others from afar, believed to be used extensively in Kalimantan.

Aware of this problem in 2022, before the city's construction began, President Joko Widodo led a ritual called *Kendi Nusantara*, or "A Jug of Nusantara", to appease the local spirits. This involved regional leaders blending soil and water samples from their home regions in a large clay pot to seek permission for the construction from resident spirits. Ilham Triadi Nagoro, a curator at the Banyuwangi Regency Culture and Tourism Office and a renowned rain shaman, was also hired by the public works minister to spend 22 days in the new capital, to "ward off magical influences". He came armed with 1,000 sticks of sacred incense and three antique daggers, one of which, Ilham claims, originated in the 14th century Majapahit empire and has the power to eliminate any obstacles faced by its wielder.

However, local Dayak tribes have rejected Jokowi's ritual as it did not represent the local Dayak culture and, it is claimed, have seen it as a "call to war", launching their own supernatural counterattacks against the government's plans, with each local tribe using its own unique *santet* magic practices. These include *parang maya*, in which a shaman conjures deadly poisons blown by the wind to protect their village, and the *panah terong* curse, which slowly withers and liquefies the victim over time. Allegedly these techniques have already been used to resist eviction from villages and to protect ancestral graves sited in the area. Indonesian historian Muhammad Sarip, though, says that the fears of black magic being used against Nusantara are "overblown", and that Kalimantan is not some "primitive zone", but urged officials to be mindful of local customs. *msn.com, 21 Aug 2024.*

QUEENS SACRIFICES

The Queens district of New York is experiencing a wave of animal sacrifice in parkland around Jamaica Bay. In just over a month in late summer, park workers discovered a nearly dead baby rat tied up in a bag with chicken bones; at different times they also found a freshly decapitated chicken head, a live hen tied up and in distress, and a dead dog with its neck snapped, as well as five live pigs with partially severed ears. One of the mutilated pigs was discovered in poor condition in a food-filled crate, with a deep gash running down its face and its body covered in oils and spices.

"It's continually getting worse. The animal sacrifices are happening more repeatedly, more times a week," said Sloane Quealy from Zion's Mission Animal Rescue. No one has been caught carrying out the sacrifices, and there is some doubt as to who might be responsible. Santeria and voodoo practitioners are known to use the park for sacrificial rites, while some have pointed the finger at a local Hindu sect that worships Kali. They have carried out animal sacrifice in the area for decades, although Acharya Arun Gossai, who runs the Bhuvaneshwar Mandir Temple in nearby Ozone Park, says: "It's a misconstruing of what the scriptures say about conquering the animalistic values. They've twisted it, and they've sacrificed an actual animal rather than sacrificing the animalistic qualities of man." *nypost.com, 7 Sept 2024.*

VOODOO POGROM

Over the weekend of 7 December 2024 at least 184 people were massacred in the Cité Soleil district of Port au Prince in Haiti according to UN rights commissioner, Volker Turk. The wave of killings was reported as being overseen by "powerful

SCOTT RUSCILLO

gang leader" Monel 'King Mikanor' Felix, leader of the Wharf Jeremie gang, with most of those targeted being practitioners of Voodoo. Felix's son had recently died of a serious illness, and it is alleged that he blamed this on a curse laid on him by followers of the religion.

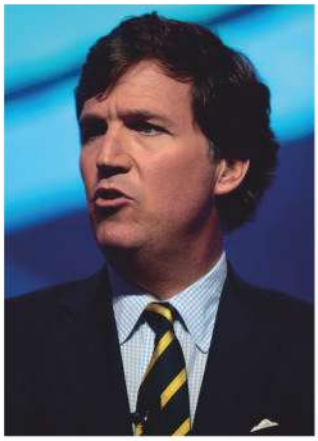
"He decided to cruelly punish all elderly people and Voodoo practitioners who, in his imagination, would be capable of sending a bad spell on his son," said a spokesperson for the Haiti-based civil organisation the Committee for Peace and Development (CPD). "The gang's soldiers were responsible for identifying victims in their homes to take them to the chief's stronghold to be executed." The CPD said that most of the victims were over 60, but some younger people who tried to rescue them had also been killed. "Reliable sources within the community report that more than a hundred people were massacred, their bodies mutilated and burned in the street"; their remains were then reportedly thrown into the sea. A series of natural disasters have devastated Haiti in recent years, leaving it with long term instability and it is estimated that gangs control over 80 per cent of Port au Prince. *theguardian.com; cbsnews.com, 9 Dec 2024.*

DEMON-SCARRED

Right wing US media personality and Trump favourite Tucker Carlson claimed during an interview on the "Christianities?" YouTube channel that he still bore the scars from being "physically mauled" by a demon that had clawed him in bed and left him bleeding (**FT452:46-49**). Asked about the presence of evil, Carlson told host John Heers "I got attacked while I was asleep with my wife and four dogs and mauled, physically mauled, by a demon or by something unseen that left claw marks on my sides."

Elaborating on his experience, Carlson went on to say, "I was totally confused, I woke up, and I couldn't breathe, and I thought I was going to suffocate. And I walked around outside and then I walked in and my wife and dogs had not woken up. And they're very light sleepers. And then I had these terrible pains on my rib cage and on my shoulder, and

GAGE SKIDMORE



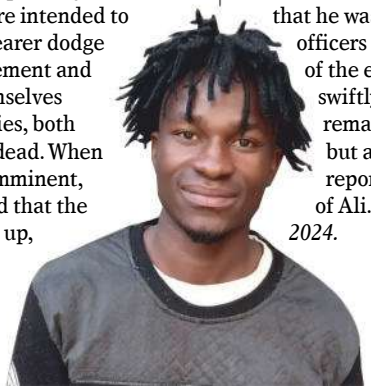
"I had four claw marks on either side. And they're bleeding."

I was just in my boxer shorts and I went and flipped on the light in the bathroom, and I had four claw marks on either side underneath my arms and on my left shoulder. And they're bleeding."

He denied that he could have clawed himself to make the marks, saying "I sleep on my side, so I wasn't clawing myself. I don't have long nails and they didn't fit my hands anyway." After the attack, Carlson said he was "seized with this very intense desire to read the Bible" and that doing so had been a "transformative experience". He later asked his evangelical Christian assistant if she had heard about such things happening and he said she told him: "That happens, people are attacked in their bed by demons." *mediaite.com, 31 Oct 2024.*

RING RING

The drive-by killing of a gangster in Kingston, Jamaica, caused some concern as photos of the dead man showed that he was wearing multiple rings, believed by many to be guard rings that should have prevented his death. These are items of jewellery infused with spirits by an Obeah man, and are intended to help the wearer dodge law enforcement and shield themselves from enemies, both living and dead. When danger is imminent, it is claimed that the rings warm up, alerting the wearer to peril. However, guard ring users were reassured by Ruben Williams, an Obeah worker from St Thomas, who explained why the deceased gangster's protection might have failed. "Too much guard ring can't work together because each guard ring weh you put a spirit inna one, or whatever force of order you put inna it, if a next one fi the same order, it's problem. Spirit very jealous, so each order of spirit weh you use have to be different," he explained, adding, "That spirit weh you use first, the one weh you seek him fi be your aid of protection, him want to be praised as the main one. As the general. So if you go get a next one now a use wid him, him ago bex with you and it ago cause comparison and contrariness." He did, though, say that if the guard rings were for different purposes, such as protection and business success, they could coexist compatibly. *jamaica-star.com, 13 Jun 2024.*



LEFT: Tucker Carlson claims to have been "physically mauled" by a demon. **BELOW**: Ali Mustafa, one of the brothers who escaped from their jail cell by turning into cats.

SHAPESHIFTERS ESCAPE

Among 11 suspects arrested in Meyerton, South Africa, for possessing hijacked goods were brothers Omari and Ali Mustafa. They were taken to cells in the jail, but when officers summoned them for processing, they were missing. Questioning other inmates, officers were told by another suspect, Erick Tumbulu, that he had heard the two men make "a strange like owl bird noise" and then saw them turn into cats and slip through the bars to escape. A senior police officer at the station said that "it was very suspicious that the suspects waited to arrive at the police holdings cells before they could turn into cats," adding, "I suspect someone was paid for their unlawful release" and that he was investigating the officers on duty at the time of the escape. Omari was swiftly recaptured and remained in human form, but at the time of the report, there was no sign of Ali. *news24.com, 17 Jul 2024.*

SIDELINES

MAKING A HASH

In Los Angeles, Rashun Aljuwani, 35, ended up in court after a dispute at a MacDonalds drive through. Incensed that he had been given two hash browns instead of the three he felt he was entitled to, Aljuwani told the server not to "f**k with him," and, when he was still not given his third, fetched a weapon from his car and took the extra one at gunpoint. He was easily traced via his car number plate and faced a two-to-five-year prison sentence for his actions. *signalscv.com, 31 Jul 2024.*

SHARK SURPRISE

Richard West, 35, a fisherman from Plymouth, hauled up a tiny Lego shark in his nets 20 miles (32km) south of Penzance, Cornwall, in August. "I could tell straight away what it was because I had Lego sharks in the pirate ship set when I was little," said West. He contacted the Lego Lost at Sea project, which maps marine Lego finds, and they told him this was the first-ever shark to be found from 51,800 lost when a shipping container holding 4,756,940 pieces of Lego was swept off the *Tokio Express* cargo ship on 13 February 1997. "It's priceless – it's treasure!" said West. *BBC News, 10 Aug 2024.*

STIFF COMPETITION

Normally, during football matches, Sky Sports abbreviates the name of Harrogate Town to HAR and Doncaster Rovers to DON, but when the two clashed recently they changed Doncaster's abbreviation to "DR", much to the disappointment of fans who were looking forward to seeing HAR-DON pop up on their screens. "Sky Sports, you spoil sports!" posted one viewer. *D.Star, 14 Sept 2024.*

MONKEY NUTS

Tamsin Tricker's holiday video went viral on TikTok, getting 2.4 million views, after she was filmed trying to feed a Barbary macaque in Morocco. The animal mistook her fake nails for peanuts and tried to eat them, only letting go when it was coaxed off by tour guides. "It didn't bite me hard, but I was freaked out," said Tricker, from Coulsdon in Surrey. *Metro, 1 Apr 2024.*

SIDELINES...

CHOPPER CHOPPED

Two boys aged 13 and 14, named only as Timur and Alexander, were arrested in Siberia after they blew up a $24m helicopter at Noyabrisk airport. They sneaked through a hole in the fence, doused the aircraft in in flammable liquid and ignited it by throwing cigarettes. The chopper was almost completely destroyed, and the boys were only caught when they went to hospital for treatment for burns on their faces. They claimed someone had offered them a million roubles (£8,000) to do it, having already paid them 30,000 roubles (£240) for destroying a phone tower. *Herald-Sun, 13 Sept 2024.*

GOAT FAIL

Despite their reputation for being able to climb impossible things, a goat named Ivy had to be rescued from the top of a ruined tower at Northburgh Castle in Donegal, Ireland, by the Irish Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals and Donegal Mountain Rescue. Ivy had scrambled up the tower but struggled to make her way down, fracturing a leg in the process. The alarm was raised by locals worried by her distressed bleating. *BBC News, 4 Jun 2024.*

FLORIDA TOILET

Orlando, Florida, resident Paul Kerouac filed a $100,000 lawsuit against the Dunkin' doughnut and coffee chain after claiming he received "severe and long-term injuries" from a toilet explosion at their Winter Park branch. Kerouac says that he was using the coffee shop toilet when it blew up in his face leaving him covered in fæces, urine and debris, and that he has needed mental health care and counselling since the incident. *nbcnews.com, 4 Jan 2024.*

MARTIN ROSS

BACK FROM THE DEAD | Some people weren't quite ready to check out

ABOVE: Chataporn Sriphonia came back to life while being taken to the Wat Sri Phadung Pattana temple for cremation. **BELOW:** Darshan Singh Brar was revived when the ambulance transporting his body hit a massive pothole.

• After spending time in hospital being treated for terminal liver cancer, the seriously ill Chataporn Sriphonia, 49, was taken back to her home in Udon Thani province, Thailand, in a van accompanied by paramedics. Before they got there, though, the paramedics saw that Sriphonia had stopped breathing and concluded that she had died. On arrival, without checking with doctors, they told Sriphonia's mother, Mali, of her death. Distraught, she informed their relatives and, following the Buddhist tradition of swift cremation, immediately began organising the funeral for the next day. While she did this, the paramedics took the body to the Wat Sri Phadung Pattana temple, where it would rest overnight. On the way, though, Sriphonia gasped and opened her eyes, so was rushed to the Ban Dung Crown Prince Hospital, where she was reported stable and under medical supervision. Relatives were said to be "confused" but believe Sriphonia had held on until she got home so that she could see her children before she died. *mirror.co.uk, 2 Jul 2023.*

• In an incident with frustratingly little detail given, the North East Ambulance Service, which serves the Tyneside area, has apologised to the family of an unnamed woman in her 50s who was declared dead after an incident attended by paramedics. They transported the body to Darlington Memorial Hospital, where the "dead" woman subsequently awoke. She remained, however, in a very serious condition, and died – irreversibly this time – some hours later.

"It is a miracle. We are hoping my grandfather recovers soon"

In Chandigarh, India, though, things turned out slightly better. After spending four days on a ventilator in a Patiala hospital suffering heart failure, Darshan Singh Brar, 80, was declared dead when doctors believed that his heart had stopped. His body was put in an ambulance so it could be returned to Haryana where mourning relatives had gathered and prepared for his funeral. Brar's body was accompanied on the journey by his grandson, and, when the ambulance was jarred by a massive pothole, he noticed that Brar moved his hand. He checked for a heartbeat, which he found, so asked the ambulance driver to divert to the nearest hospital. There, doctors declared Brar alive, but in a critical condition. "It is a miracle. Now we are hoping that my grandfather recovers soon. Everyone who had gathered to mourn his death congratulated us, and we requested them to have the food we had arranged. It is God's grace that he is now breathing, and we are hoping he will get better," his grandson Balwan Singh said. Dr Netrapal from Rawal Hospital added, "We cannot say that the patient had died. When he was brought to us, he was breathing and had blood pressure as well as a pulse. We don't know what happened at the other hospital, whether it was a technical error or something else." *thenorthernecho.co.uk, 16 Oct 2023; ndtv.com, 12 Jan 2024.*

DONNA ROHRER / FACEBOOK

ABOVE LEFT: Rohitash Kumar came back to life on his funeral pyre, although his resurrection proved a temporary one.
ABOVE RIGHT: Anthony Thomas "TJ" Hoover II woke up in hospital just as his organs were about to be removed.

• After a fire at her home, Bujji Aamma, 52, from Berhampur, India, was taken to hospital with severe burns over half her body, but after initial treatment she was sent home as her family did not have the funds for further care. Aamma remained there in a critical condition and after several days no longer opened her eyes. Because of the family's poverty they were unable to have her examined by another hospital and Aamma's husband Sibaram Palo said, "We thought she was dead and informed others in the locality to arrange a hearse van to carry the body to the cremation ground." Half an hour after Aamma was delivered to the cremation ground, though, a woman, named as K Chiranjibi, saw Aamma open her eyes. "Initially we were scared," she said, "as we had never seen such an incident, though we had heard some stories." The driver of the hearse was called back to collect the now clearly alive and breathing Aamma and take her back home. There were no reports as to how the resurrected Aamma fared after this, however. *metro.co.uk, 13 Feb 2024.*

• Rohitash Kumar cut it even finer. He was actually on his funeral pyre when signs of life were noticed. Kumar, 25, who had difficulties with speaking and hearing, had an epileptic seizure and was taken to hospital in Jhunjhunu in Rajasthan, India, where a doctor declared him dead on arrival. However, Dr Singh, chief medical officer of the hospital, said that the doctor had "prepared the post-mortem report without actually doing the post-mortem, and the body was then sent for cremation." He went on to explain that "shortly before the pyre was to be lit, Rohitash's body started moving," adding that "he was alive and was breathing." Kumar was rescued from the cremation and rushed back to the hospital, but later died during treatment. As a result of the incident three doctors at the hospital were suspended and a police investigation opened. *arabnews.com, 23 Nov 2024.*

• When Constance Glantz, 74, passed away in hospice care at The Mulberry care home in Waverly, Nebraska, her death was not unexpected, so staff just dispatched her body to the Butherus-Maser & Love Funeral Home for embalming without involving any medics. Once she was there though, the morticians lifting her body onto the slab realised that Glantz was still breathing. They called emergency services, and according to Sheriff's Office spokesperson Ben Houchin, "She was taken to a local hospital and is still alive." She in fact kept going until 4pm, when the hospital definitively certified her death. According to Houchin, Glantz avoided medical scrutiny earlier as in Nebraska when the death of a patient is anticipated and circumstances match certain criteria, there is no need to involve medics. "A physician had seen her in the last seven days, and the physician is willing to sign the death certificate, and that there was nothing suspicious at that time of the death – all of those fit," Houchin said, adding that he had "been doing this 31 years, and nothing like this has ever gotten to this point before. This is a very unusual case." *editions.cnn.com, 4 Jun 2024.*

• It took a bit longer for medics to realise that Anthony Thomas "TJ" Hoover II was still in the land of the living. He had been taken to Baptist Health Hospital in Richmond, Kentucky, because of a drug overdose, and after a short time on life support was reported to have no reflexes or brain activity. As a result, he was declared dead and because he had given permission for his organs to be donated was sent to surgery to have those removed while the hospital held a ceremony honouring him. Hoover's sister, Donna Rhorer, said that while he was being removed from life support she thought she saw his eyes open and track her movements, but, she said, "We were told it was just reflexes – just a normal thing." However, an hour after he was taken down to surgery, a doctor came out and explained that Hoover "wasn't ready" for organ removal on account of having woken up. An eyewitness said that Hoover began "thrashing" around on the operating table and started "crying visibly". "He made… attempts to say: 'Hey, I'm here,' but it was kind of ignored," Rhorer said. "They finally stopped the procedure because he was showing too many signs of life." Rhorer was told to take her brother home and make him comfortable, as he was unlikely to live much longer, but he survived, although he has trouble walking, talking and remembering things and needs constant care. *theguardian.com, 18 Oct 2024.*

SIDELINES...

TATTOO FOOL

After seeing an offer made on social media promising £1,400 in cash to anyone who got the logo of the local food business, Taragis Takoyaki, tattooed on their forehead, Ramil Albano, from Manila in the Philippines, went ahead and got the tattoo without bothering to click on "further details". Had he done so he would have found out the post was an April Fool's prank and no such offer existed, but he only discovered this when he posted a video to the company's webpage showing himself getting inked to claim the prize. *independent.co.uk, 4 Apr 2024.*

SLIGHTLY FOXED

Eco-friendly brake cable coatings introduced by car manufacturers have unexpectedly landed car owners with major repair bills because foxes like to chew through them. AA Spokesperson Jack Cousens said, "Some cables can be soy-based and they get attracted to the taste." *Sun, 12 May 2024.*

TERROR TRANSLATION

A confused Russian-speaking tourist from Azerbaijan, visiting Lisbon, Portugal, found himself surrounded by armed police, handcuffed and made to lie face down on the ground after he tried to order a drink. The 36-year-old man had used a translation app to make his order and while the words for "pomegranate" and "hand grenade" are the same in Russian, they are not in Portuguese, and the app had failed to take account of this subtlety. As a result, the waiter believed the note he was passed to order the drink was a threat and called the police, who thought they were dealing with a terrorist. *D.Telegraph, 31 Oct 2023.*

A NAKED MAN…

"You got a cop and a naked dude, I thought he was going to be handcuffed and thrown to the ground," said Kyle Even, filming an altercation in Las Vegas. Instead, the naked man, later identified as Clyde Cabulisan, 29, knocked the policeman to the ground and stole his patrol car, careering off across the city chased by other police cars before finally colliding with another vehicle, critically injuring its occupants. Cabulisan ended up charged with robbery, disobeying a police officer, endangering people/property, grand larceny, and battery on a protected person. *koydenhaber.com, 2 Nov 2023.*

SIDELINES...

BAT'S REVENGE

While Ozzy Osbourne is legendary for biting the head off a live bat on stage, the boot was on the other foot for Pretty Reckless singer Taylor Momsen, who was bitten on the leg by a bat while onstage with the band in Seville, Spain. Initially oblivious to the attack, Momsen was alerted to it by shouts from the crowd, eventually saying "There's a f**king flying bat on my leg right now. Could someone help me please?" Stagehands scared the bat off and Momsen went to hospital for rabies shots after the show. *metro.co.uk, 31 May 2024.*

POP STAR

After he burgled several supermarkets in Nottinghamshire and made off with 17 tubes of Pringles crisps, police arrested Adam Spencer, 40, in Sutton-in-Ashfield. Questioned about why he had committed the offences, Spencer replied "Once you pop, you can't stop," the snack's famous advertising slogan. *BBC News, 2 Jun 2024.*

SEX AND DEATH

Police in the village of Kilgobnet in Waterford, Ireland, are using covert audio recording to try and trap someone who is repeatedly playing obscene audio recordings near the church during funerals. The recorded sex noises are loud enough to disrupt the services and have reduced mourners to tears, with locals describing them as "offensive, disrespectful and deeply upsetting". The police, who have so far failed to find any leads, are not sure whether the timing is incidental and the activity just a prank, or whether it is deliberately intended to interfere with funerals. *Irish Independent, 20 Jun 2024.*

MARTIN ROSS

MONOPOLY MYSTERY | Abandoned board game hoard baffles villagers

Residents of an unnamed Devon village were surprised to find that a vast pile of Monopoly board games had appeared in the overgrown drive of an uninhabited local bungalow. The heap was made up of more than just the classic version of the game, it also included a whole variety of special editions such as Elf, Minions and World Football Stars Monopoly, and most seemed to be of fairly recent manufacture. No one saw them being dumped and there was considerable speculation about where they might have come from on Reddit, ranging from a collection belonging to someone who had died that their family had disposed of, to warehouse stock from a bankrupt company. One commenter said "My guess is messy divorce. They know they'll be round in a couple of days to save the collection, so the collection is spending those days in the rain". Another said that whoever did this "would be a monumental moron to not just give them to charity, try to sell them or at the very least put it all in a skip" as the kind of editions found in the pile are fetching between £15 and £30 on eBay, meaning several thousand pounds worth of Monopoly had been just left to rot. *devonlive.com, 19 Nov 2024.*

CLASSICAL CORNER

FORTEANA FROM THE ANCIENT WORLD COMPILED BY BARRY BALDWIN

306: VIRGIL TIPS (NOT VIRGIL TIBBS)

"And (as I open the book at random again): 'A barrier to rational thinking, in anything like a final sense, is continuity, because of which only fictitiously can anything be picked out of a nexus of all things phenomenal, to think about'" – Damon Knight, Introduction to Fort's *Books*.

Knight is here practising bibliomancy of a sort. Divining one's future from opening a book and finding a specific passage was one of various ancient attempts to detect an individual's future, as do moderns with horoscopes and the like. It may be seen as the literary equivalent of Tarot cards or planchette and Ouija Boards, these latter two being employed in the later Roman Empire (**FT262:23**).

First come the *Sortes Homericæ*, sentences plucked from a random opening of Homer, pretty well equivalent to an Hellenic Shakespeare. There are surprisingly few texts, but there must have been many episodes not reported.

Socrates in his death cell (Plato, *Crito*, paras44a-b) used *Iliad*, bk9 v363, "To the pleasant land of Phythia on the third day shalt thou come", to determine his execution day. Significantly, his interlocutor Crito dismisses this as "nonsense". Several sources record that Brutus predicted Pompey would lose the Battle of Pharsalus to Cæsar from *Iliad*, bk16 v849: "By the cruel crown of Fate I was undone, and by the rancour of Latona's son." The latter was Apollo, whose name was Pompey's battle password.

Brutus, of course, could not use Virgil's *Æneid*, the Roman bibliomantic centre-piece, it not having yet been written.

The ephemeral Roman emperor Macrinus (AD 217) was warned he would not last long on the throne by *Iliad*, bk8 vv 102-3, "Old man, these tough young fighters are too strong / And age won't let you hold on very long" – Dio Cassius, bk70 ch40.

At first glance, perhaps surprising that a Roman emperor would appeal to Homer rather than Virgil. However, his biographer stresses his bilingual competence and interest in Greek poetry more than once.

Three articles deal comprehensively with Virgilio-mancy: DA Slater, '*Sortes Vergilianæ*, Or Vergil and Today,' published as a pamphlet (Blackwell, 1922), originally given as a public lecture in the University of Liverpool, 27 May 1921. This was reviewed by C Knapp, *Classical Weekly* 18 (1924), 33-4. HA Loane, 'The *Sortes Vergilianæ*,' *Classical Weekly* 21 (1928), 185-9 – all available online. NB: It matters not whether you spell the poet Vergil or Virgil.

Loane in particular cites in full all the *Æneid* passages along with the individual contexts which I have no room for. All examples involve Roman emperors: Hadrian, Clodius Albinus, Severus Alexander, Claudius II, Gordian.

There is one immediate problem. Hadrian is the first known consulter of Virgil. All the above derive solely from the most unreliable of all Roman sources, the collection of imperial biographies we call the *Augustan History*. This has led some to deny the practice at all, claiming the passages in question merely point to oracles in Virgil. See the anonymous online essay 'Re-divining the *Sortes Vergilianæ*' with bibliography, especially Phyllis Katz.

Agnosticism over the *Augustan History* is all too often justified. Still, it is worth remembering that there were sundry other now-lost imperial biographies and histories which might have mentioned the practice.

Disbelief also involves ignoring some ancient evidences. Augustine (*Confessions*, bk4 ch3 para5), speaks of *vim sortis* (the power of divination) felt by those who consult the works of a poet. Augustine admits (*Confessions*, bk1 chs12-3, and elsewhere) that he never mastered Greek and found Homer uncongenial, whereas he was steeped in Virgil to the point where it has been argued that his *Confessions* were consciously constructed to echo the Æneid. Hence, his unnamed poet must be Virgil.

Qualms about the *Augustan History* are strictly modern. Consulting Virgil has a long post-Roman run. It features enormously in Book Three of Rabelais wherein Panurge scrabbles through Virgil's poems to find favourable omens for his intended marriage.

The most celebrated English example has Charles I plucking out Dido's imprecations against Æneas as a harbinger of his own grisly fate. Primary sources are discrepant over where this took place (Bodleian Library is the most-cited), but no cause to disbelieve the story.

Commenting on one of the poet Abraham Cowley's official letters written in Paris (1650), Samuel Johnson in his *Life of Cowley* suggested: "I cannot but suspect Cowley of having consulted on this great occasion the Virgilian lots, and to have given some credit to the answer of his oracles."

Thomas de Quincy in one of his essays on Modern Superstitions deplored prophetic thumbing of Homer, the Bible, and especially Virgil: "No worse book could have been consulted." De Quincy's objurgation was ignored by Robert Louis Stevenson in his depiction of Herrick in *The Ebb Tide*.

Slater listed various cases of the *Æneid* being appealed to (by himself) at the outbreak of the Great War, during Zeppelin raids on London, and the fate of the Czar in the Russian Revolution. One wonders if some of the classically educated officers in the trenches were thumbing their Virgils while the squaddies were imbibing Housman's *Shropshire Lad*?

Of course, some people chose other books for personal prophecies. Wanting to know his chances of marrying Elizabeth Barrett, Browning took up (of all things) Cerutti's *Italian Grammar*, but happened upon a translation exercise which ran: "If we love in the other world as we do in this, I shall love thee to eternity." Everybody knows how that turned out.

In one of her 'A Don's Life' blogs (30 Mar 2012), the omniscient, omnipresent classicist Mary Beard gave an hilarious account of her first-ever try at the *Sortes Virgilianæ*. She and publisher wanted to know the fate of her new book. Her first go elicited the line "Everybody fell silent", which they took to mean "the presses have shut down." Second effort produced verses describing Æneas dumping Dido and cutting a mid-way course through the black waves. They optimistically agreed this meant: "The trusty book would cling to the market's middle, scattering black Kindles right and left."

With the advent of Christianity, Homer and Virgil were naturally replaced by the Bible. Augustine (*Confessions*, bk8 ch12 para30) mentions consulting Paul's Letters. Byzantine emperor Heraclius sought holy guidance on where to bivouac his soldiers (Theophanes, *Chronicle*, ch308 paras15-6). Although the Church officially outlawed all kinds of divination, it seems to have turned a blind eye to this one, approved by the monk Anastasius of Sinai (*Questions* 150-1).

Just seen on Art Farstad's Read Your Bible! website: A Bible-hunter first hit Matthew 27.5: And Judas went out and hanged himself. Second try Luke 10.33: Go and Do Thou Likewise. Third go John 13.27: What Thou Do, Doest Quickly

QUESTION to FT readers: Your suggestions of other books to consult?

PAUL SIEVEKING rounds up the latest finds, from a hermit's hoard to a slab of Bronze Age butter

POLISH HOARD

A treasure trove of coins linked to Antoni Jaczewicz, one of Poland's most infamous hermit criminals from the 1700s, has been discovered in the country's Swietokrzyskie Mountains, roughly 110 miles (177km) from Warsaw. The Swietokrzyskie Exploration Group had been exploring the mountains for roughly seven years when their search yielded a find of ancient coins. It started with a single pile, but the group soon found more coins buried in groups, all from the 17th and 18th centuries. The stockpile features orts, sixes, patagoons, kraicars, and kopecks, but the most fascinating piece was a gold Hamburg ducat from 1648 with an image of Madonna holding a child. A hole punched into the coin has led experts to believe it was once worn as a medallion.

Jaczewicz was a hermit, adventurer, false prophet, and criminal. During a plague at the start of the Great Northern War, he sold himself as someone with healing powers given directly to him by the Mother of God, who apparently lived with him in the wilderness. The Jaczewicz scam garnered large numbers of donations meant to incentivise the man to employ these healing powers, and Jaczewicz eventually had to hire a group of guards to protect his fraudulent gains from bandits looking to plunder his loot.

But keeping the dishonest gains wasn't enough, and soon, Jaczewicz sent that assembly of guards to rob travelling pilgrims and raid surrounding properties. He was eventually captured, but escaped his first sentencing. He was later recaptured, and was sentenced to life in prison in 1712, just four years after his criminal behaviour took root in the Swietokrzyskie Mountains. Even with Jaczewicz imprisoned and his guards disbanded, his loot was never unearthed. Officials believe the discovered coins tie directly to Jaczewicz, and were a mix of the fees collected by the hermit and items stolen from the surrounding nobility. Work on the current treasure continues, but according to the *Miami Herald*, it might not be the only treasure in the area. Officials told local media that they believe more hoards could be buried nearby. The collection – and legend of Jaczewicz – may still grow. *popularmechanics.com, 14 May 2024.*

SWIETOKRZYSKIE EXPLORATIOMN GROUP

BOOTHYBOY99 / WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

LEFT: Some of the coins discovered in Poland's Swietokrzyskie Mountains. **BELOW:** Old coins placed in the Wish Tree on Isle Maree.

COINS IN TREE TRUNKS

If you've ever been out walking and seen a metallic, scaly tree trunk covered in coins, you've likely seen a wish tree. This product of folklore is thought to have been practised for hundreds of years, granting wishes and "curing" physical ailments with each hammering of a coin into the trunk of a tree. A common offering for wish trees is coins, which can be hammered with such enthusiasm that the tree trunk's surface becomes transformed. This was remarked upon by Colonel Eddington following a 1927 visit to Isle Maree, where he saw a wish tree "covered with metallic scales... something like what is depicted on a dragon". The exact meaning of the coins' deposition varies, but generally centres around a theme of leaving behind a wish or physical ailment to be healed, such as a toothache. A similar practice has been seen in places such as Cornwall with the deposition of nails into trees, and like coins, they sometimes get swallowed by the trunk's bark as the tree continues to grow.

Another form of ritual deposition is a common sight in urban environments: love locks. While the end goal is quite different, the practice shares similarities with the love lock tradition of attaching padlocks to bridges (see **FT239:25, 294:16**). The locks themselves may be mass-produced and impersonal, but it's regularly observed that people may etch or paint initials or messages onto the love locks to impart some personal meaning and attachment. *iflscience.com, 31 July 2024.*

BALTIC BUBBLY

A 19th century sailing ship, "loaded to the sides" with champagne, wine, mineral water and porcelain, was found in the Baltic Sea on 11 July 2024. Divers counted more than 100 bottles of champagne in the wreck, about 20 nautical miles (37km) south of the Swedish island of Oland. Tomasz Stachura, of Polish diving group Baltitech, which specialises in exploring shipwrecks in the Baltic, said: "I've been a diver for 40 years. From time to time, you see one or two bottles. But I've never seen crates with bottles of alcohol, and baskets of water, like this."

The clay water bottles, showing the brand name of German company Selters, helped date the wreck to between 1850 and 1867. While champagne would be of more interest to many today, mineral water was an exclusive product "treated almost like medicine" which "only found its way to royal tables", said Stachura. "Its value was so precious that transports were escorted by the police." He believes the goods could have been heading for the table of Russia's Tsar Nicholas I, who is reported to have lost one of his ships in the area in 1852. Stachura believes both the champagne and prestigious mineral water would be

ANTIQUITY JOURNAL

FACEBOOK

ABOVE LEFT: An animal bone used for stashing henbane seeds; it had kept them safe for nearly 2,000 years. **ABOVE RIGHT:** The 22kg slab of ancient butter found on a farm in Donegal, Ireland. **BELOW:** The giant 2,492-carat diamond found in Botswana's Karowe mine.

drinkable today. For now, the treasure is staying where it is, with underwater archæologists called in to assist. *BBC News, 5 July; D. Express, 27 July 2024.*

'BOG BUTTER' FIND

A slab of butter has been uncovered on Micheál Boyle's farm in Loughfad, Portnoo, in Donegal, Ireland. Boyle estimated that the slab weighed about 22kg (48.5lb), and historians say that it could possibly date back to the Bronze Age. "It was just by pure luck that we came across it," Boyle said. "I could see this white thing in the ground. The minute I went down to it, I could get a smell off it and it was only about a foot into the ground. It's a perfect rectangle and was perfectly held together. This is only clay ground here, but it maybe was bogland back in time."

Butter was sometimes buried in a bog to preserve it, while some people also buried butter as an offering to the gods or spirits and it was often encased in wooden containers. There was one little piece of wood at the bottom end of this butter, suggesting it was originally in a box which has since decomposed. *Irish Examiner, 5 July 2024.*

BRONZE AGE TRIPPING

Analysis of human hair from the Es Càrritx cave in Menorca, first occupied around 3,600 year ago, indicates consumption of hallucinogens in Bronze Age ceremonies, the first direct evidence of ancient drug use in Europe. Atropine, scopolamine and ephedrine were detected in the three samples, dated to around 3,000 years ago after analysis with ultra-high-performance liquid chromatography and high-resolution mass spectrometry. Atropine and scopolamine are naturally found in nightshade plants – such as mandrake (*Mandragora autumnalis*), henbane (*Hyoscyamus albus*) and thorn apple (*Datura stramonium*) and can induce delirium, hallucinations and altered sensory perception, such as the sensation of flying; while the ephedrine probably came from the consumption of joint pine (*Ephedra fragilis*) and can increase excitement, alertness and physical activity. It is thought these plants may have been used in ritual ceremonies performed by a shaman. Concentric circles on the wooden containers containing the drugs may have depicted eyes and could have been a metaphor for a drug-induced state of consciousness. *National Geographic, 6 April*; *Guardian, 7 April; D.Express, 8 April; Sunday Mercury, 9 April 2024.*

HENBANE FIND

In 2011, an ancient pit filled with 86,000 animal bones was discovered at a Roman-era farmstead near Utrecht in the Netherlands. Archæologist Martijn van Haasteren was cleaning the mud from one sheep or goat bone when hundreds of black specks came pouring out from one end. They turned out to be black henbane seeds (*Hyoscyamus niger*), a potentially poisonous member of the nightshade family that can be medicinal or hallucinogenic depending on the dosage. The bone – hollowed out and sealed with a tar plug – was an ancient stash pouch that had kept the seeds safe for some 1,900 years. The plant was mostly used in Roman times as an ointment for pain relief, although some sources mention smoking its seeds or adding its leaves to wine. Its psychedelic effects came to the fore in the Middle Ages, when black henbane became associated with witches and summoning demons. *snithsonianmag.com, sciencealert.com, 13 Feb; NY Times Int. edition, 13 April 2024.*

MONSTER DIAMOND

A 2,492-carat diamond has been found in Botswana, the second-largest gem-quality diamond ever found. Another smaller gem from the same Karowe mine was sold for £48 million in 2016, a record for a rough gem. The Sewelo diamond, found in the Karowe mine in 2019, was the second-biggest diamond in the world at 1,758 carats until this latest discovery. Botswana is the world's largest producer of diamonds, and the trade has transformed it into a middle-income nation. Karowe remains one of the highest-margin diamond mines in the world, producing an average of 300,000 high-value carats each year. The world champion is the Cullinan diamond, mined in South Africa in 1905, which (uncut), weighed 3,106 carats. *D.Mail, 23 Aug 2024.*

LUCARA DIAMOND CORP

THE GREAT DRONE PANIC

The close of 2024 saw an old-school flap based on new technology and spread by social media

In mid-November, authorities in New Jersey started receiving reports of repeated drone incursions over Naval Weapons Station Earle, as well as over the large military research and manufacturing facility at the Picatinny Arsenal and over Donald Trump's Bedminster golf course. The drones were estimated to be "SUV-sized", and their origin could not be identified, so the FBI appealed for public assistance in spotting the devices and their operators, while stressing there was no threat to public safety. This resulted in more than 5,000 reports of sightings from the public, of which the FBI felt only 100 were worth following up.

Noel Thomas from Edison reported seeing "a triangle-shaped drone with three flashing lights of different colours" hovering over a power plant. Evan Cutler from Montclair saw something he at first thought was the Moon, but which he concluded was "an object the size of a school bus and rectangular with blinking lights" that he believed was much too low to be a plane or a helicopter. "I've seen hundreds and hundreds of drones… It was definitely something I've never seen," he said. Chris Smith, a New Jersey Congressman, said a local sheriff had told him that "one of his officers saw 50 drones come in off the ocean. We had a number of other people there including a commanding officer from the Coast Guard who said one of their 47-ft lifeboats was followed by between 12 and 30 of these drones, right behind them," and called for the Department of Defense to get involved.

As drone reports proliferated, local officials voiced frustration about the lack of updates from the FBI and other federal agencies, with a group of New Jersey mayors expressing anger that nothing was being done and calling for people to be allowed to shoot drones down. This swiftly escalated to Congress; Tony Gonzalez, a Texas Republican, asked Robert Wheeler Jr, a

BRIAN GLENN

It was "an object the size of a school bus with blinking lights"

senior FBI Director, "You're telling me we don't know what the hell these drones in New Jersey are?" to which Wheeler replied, "That's correct," prompting Gonzales to say, "That's crazy! That's madness!" Donald Trump cancelled a trip to Bedminster because of the drones, saying, "The government knows what is happening," although without explaining whether this was merely his opinion or the result of a briefing he had received.

This confusion and apparent inaction fuelled speculation. Another New Jersey Congressman, Jeff van Drew, voiced his suspicion that an "Iranian Mothership" off the coast was deploying the drone swarm. The Pentagon, though, said there was no evidence that any foreign adversary was involved. National Security Council Spokesperson John Kirby stressed that "our assessment at this stage is that the activity represents commercial, hobbyist, [and] law enforcement drones – all operating legally – and/or civilian aviation aircraft." Meanwhile, comments made on social media by John Ferguson, the CEO of a drone manufacturer, claimed that the drones were covertly searching for some kind of dangerous material, possibly a nuclear weapon or a toxic gas leak. These claims circulated widely on social media, amassing more than 30 million views on X. There was a grain of truth in them; some nuclear material had been lost in New Jersey. This was a tiny quantity of slightly radioactive Germanium-68, used to calibrate PET scanners, lost when the package containing it had been damaged in transit. This, though, did not pose the kind of risk that would need drones to sweep the state, and it had been recovered by the time Ferguson went public; he went on to say he had been unaware of this incident. A spokesperson from the National Nuclear Security Administration said that they were not engaged in any operations involving radiological or nuclear threats and that they used aircraft, not drones, to carry out searches anyway.

A Facebook video, shared more than 1,000 times, spread the idea that advanced drones were zapping New Jersey with "space-based lasers" to control people's minds. Dozens of posts on X claimed the drones were part of "Project Blue Beam," an idea originating in the 1990s that claims technology will be used by elites to fake an alien invasion and control the world. Soon, the ufology establishment was getting involved, with Luis Elizondo and Ross Coulthart posting video clips recorded by locals showing glowing orbs floating across the state, demanding action to identify and stop the objects, with the added implication that they might not be of human origin. Steven Greer suggested that drones might be being used

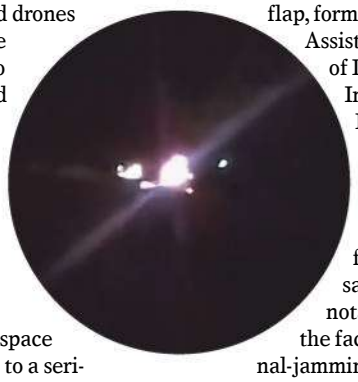
LEFT: Brian Glenn took this photo of lights over Bernardsville, New Jersey, on 5 December 2024. **BELOW:** The *Star Wars* prop that Senator Mastriano mistook for "a crashed drone".

to distract people from *real* UFOs; others proposed that the drones might be testing public reaction prior to "UFO disclosure" in 2025. On TikTok there was a rash of fake drone footage, often digitally created. In one case, video of a "shot down drone" proved to be of a light aircraft that had crashed in Connecticut, while Pennsylvania's State Senator Doug Mastriano posted a photo of a spaceship from *Star Wars* on X, captioned "a crashed drone".

Sifting through the reports, it became increasingly clear that asking members of the public to scrutinise the sky when they were not particularly skilled at doing so may have been counterproductive. Sceptic Mick Wall pointed out that in every case he was aware of where the date, time and location of a drone sighting could be identified, the alleged "drone" could be shown to be a satellite, planet, star or aircraft. Former Maryland Governor Larry Hogan reported that he had "personally witnessed (and videoed) what appeared to be dozens of large drones" over his house, but the "drones" where swiftly identified as the stars of Orion's belt. Senator Andy Kim of New Jersey posted videos of drones flying over the Round Valley Reservoir, but later admitted they were "almost certainly planes". New Jersey is under the flight paths for several major airports serving New York, and Wall recommended people checked any sighting against apps that showed aircraft and satellite movements before concluding that they were seeing mystery drones. As a result of these misidentifications the FBI pushed back against suggestions that drones should be shot down and warned against people firing or pointing lasers at them as this could cause an aircraft to crash.

As the month progressed, there was more media emphasis on "orbs" rather than drones, possibly because out-of-focus video makes stars, satellites or aircraft lights appear as glowing fuzzy balls, and it is easier to claim these are something strange when evidence of solid machines is lacking. By New Year, with the distraction of the holidays, reports seem to have petered out. At its peak, the whole thing seemed to become self-generating, with officials attempting to calm public concern by taking various actions, such as banning drones. The public then interpreted this as confirmation that the drones were real, further increasing their concern and reinforcing calls for action.

While the overwhelming mass of New Jersey drone reports seem to be the result of a social panic fuelled by official encouragement, that's not to say there weren't real mystery drones somewhere in the mix. The incursion at Picatinny and Earle is entirely in keeping with incidents at other military installations that have been taken seriously by people who can tell a drone from a star. The initial Picatinny event was reported to have involved up to 12 large, unidentified drones flying over the site for upwards of two hours and resulted in military and police helicopters being deployed. While the New Jersey flap was going on, Wright-Patterson Airforce base in Ohio closed its airspace for four hours due to a serious drone incursion, and in the UK, just prior to the New Jersey activity, there were several incidents where drones were again observed by people who knew what they were looking at. There, the reports and official responses had a very different tone to those in New Jersey.



The UK incursions took place at three East Anglian airbases used by US forces; RAF Mildenhall and RAF Lakenheath in Suffolk, and RAF Feltwell in Norfolk, which experienced several drone incidents in late November. The US military remained tight-lipped but acknowledged that drones were flying over the bases, saying, "We can confirm there were sightings yesterday during nighttime hours and can only confirm the number of UASs (Uncrewed Aerial Systems) fluctuated and they ranged in size/configuration." However, locals living in the village of Beck Row, next to the Mildenhall base, reported frequently seeing brightly lit aerial vehicles hovering over the base, and sometimes their houses as well. People around Mildenhall also noted an increase in patrolling planes, and there is evidence that agents from the US Air Force Office of Special Investigations were questioning locals about what they had seen. Roger Smith, a Suffolk-based military aviation enthusiast, said that the US Air Force pilots were "now using an encrypted data link instead of radios when speaking to the ground, while a fellow local plane spotter alleged that a Pegasus air refuelling aircraft had been forced to divert to Glasgow Prestwick Airport after aborting an approach to RAF Mildenhall because of drone activity.

Just prior to the New Jersey flap, former US Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Intelligence Chris Mellon commented on the repeated drone incursions at US military facilities. He said "Two of the notable aspects are the fact our drone signal-jamming devices have proven ineffective, and these craft are making no effort to remain concealed… In fact, in some instances it is clear they want to be seen as though taunting us" and that "their brazenness, range, flight duration, reliability, resistance to countermeasures and indifference to detection are confounding." Mellon also revealed that "in some cases 'mother ships' have been reported," describing these as "extremely fast larger vehicles that have been observed collecting or releasing swarms of smaller craft." In an incident in Nebraska, investigated by the Federal Aviation Administration, Special Agent Michael Bumberger, local sheriffs reported seeing 30 to 50 unusual craft flying independently of one another, accompanied by a larger "mother ship" that hovered nearby for hours.

General Mark Kelly, the commander of Langley Air Force Base Air Combat Command, also revealed that the appearance of elusive unidentifiable drones over the base last year led to two weeks of emergency White House meetings. He admitted that despite 10 months of intensive investigation at all the sites where drones had been seen, they are no closer to stopping the drones or discovering who is operating them. Kelly said the drones that persistently buzzed Langley appeared to be 20ft (6m) long and were able to fly at over 100mph (61kph) at an altitude between 3,000 and 4,000ft (914 and 1219m), so were not commercial drones being used by members of the public, although military analyst Marik Von Rennenkampff says that: "If this was a foreign intelligence gathering operation the brazen nature of the incursions makes it some of the worst collection tradecraft imaginable." Kelly also said that when Langley brought in specialised "drone buster" technology designed to jam the signals guiding remotely piloted drones, whatever was flying over the base "failed to register" on their equipment and would just vanish, despite being hunted with the best technology available to the US military and NASA. Mellon said that the problem was "so sustained and disruptive that an entire fighter wing had to be relocated to another base."

Despite the obvious social panic aspects of the New Jersey incident, these drone incursions resist easy explanation. In the pre-drone/UAP era, they would have been interpreted as a classic UFO flap, complete with "Men in Black" interviewing witnesses, and indeed they bear strong resemblance to UFO incidents going back to at least the 1960s, except with smaller vehicles at lower altitudes. Perhaps we are seeing the birth of "microufology"?

For more on the drone panic, turn to Nigel Watson's 'Saucers of the Damned' column on p.26.

dailymail.com, 14 Oct; twz.com, 20+22+25 Nov, 24 Dec; bbc.co.uk/news, 26+30 Nov, 17 Dec; [AP] 4 Dec; eu.northjersey.com, 10 Dec; vice.com, 12 Dec; abcnews.go.com, edition.cnn.com, 17 Dec; fox5ny.com, forbes.com, dailygrail.com, 18 Dec; cbsnews.com, 19 Dec 2024; themirror.com, 1 Jan 2025.

@_BUCKY13 VIA TIKTOK

Edinburgh, city of ghosts

ALAN MURDIE is pleased by news of a healthy crop of hauntings in the Scottish capital

ADAM WILSON / UNSPLASH

ABOVE: Ghost tours have long flourished in the Old Town of Edinburgh. **BELOW:** The house of Major Weir, the infamous warlock of the West Bow.

For generations Edinburgh has topped many lists of great haunted British cities, enthusiastically embracing its multitude of ghosts and grim historic crimes as an attraction and entertainment for visitors, long before the term 'Dark Tourism' was ever uttered. For decades now ghost guides and tours have flourished in and around the Old Town of Scotland's capital sharing a selection of vintage supernatural and hair-raising tales.

Up and around the Royal Mile you can shudder at retellings of these classics, with guides dilating accounts of the wicked Major Weir, the infamous warlock of the West Bow (**FT311:30-38**), and the ghostly piper trapped in a tunnel leading to Edinburgh Castle. You may hear of the murder of Rizzio, the lover of Mary Queen of Scots at Holyrood Palace, of 'the rabid and gluttonous' Mad Son of Queensberry who roasted a servant boy on a spit and ate him close to the site of the Scottish Parliament and the murderous villainy of 1820s body snatchers Burke and Hare and their alleged ghostly echoes.

Most of these stories were firmly embedded in Edinburgh lore by the mid-19th century, the only major modern accretion being the vengeful 'MacKenzie Poltergeist' supposedly lurking in Greyfriars Kirkyard to scratch, bruise and prod hapless people venturing among the sculptured tombs and grandiose mausoleums since the late 1990s (**FT238:75**).

> The Mad Son of Queensberry roasted a servant boy on a spit and ate him

Below street level, you may teeter through the subterranean warren of antique passages and spaces at Mary King's Close and the South Bridge Vaults. The latter was chosen for ghost hunting experiments conducted by psychologists in 2001, with volunteers walking and sharing their intuitions and impressions. Results from these experiential walkabouts showed significant concentrations of unusual experiences, perhaps correlated with subtle environmental factors such as variations in local magnetic fields and lighting levels. (See **FT147:6** and 'An investigation into alleged 'hauntings' by Richard Wiseman, Caroline Watt, Paul Stevens, Emma Greening and Ciaran O'Keeffe, *British Journal of Psychology* (2003) vol. 94, 195-211).

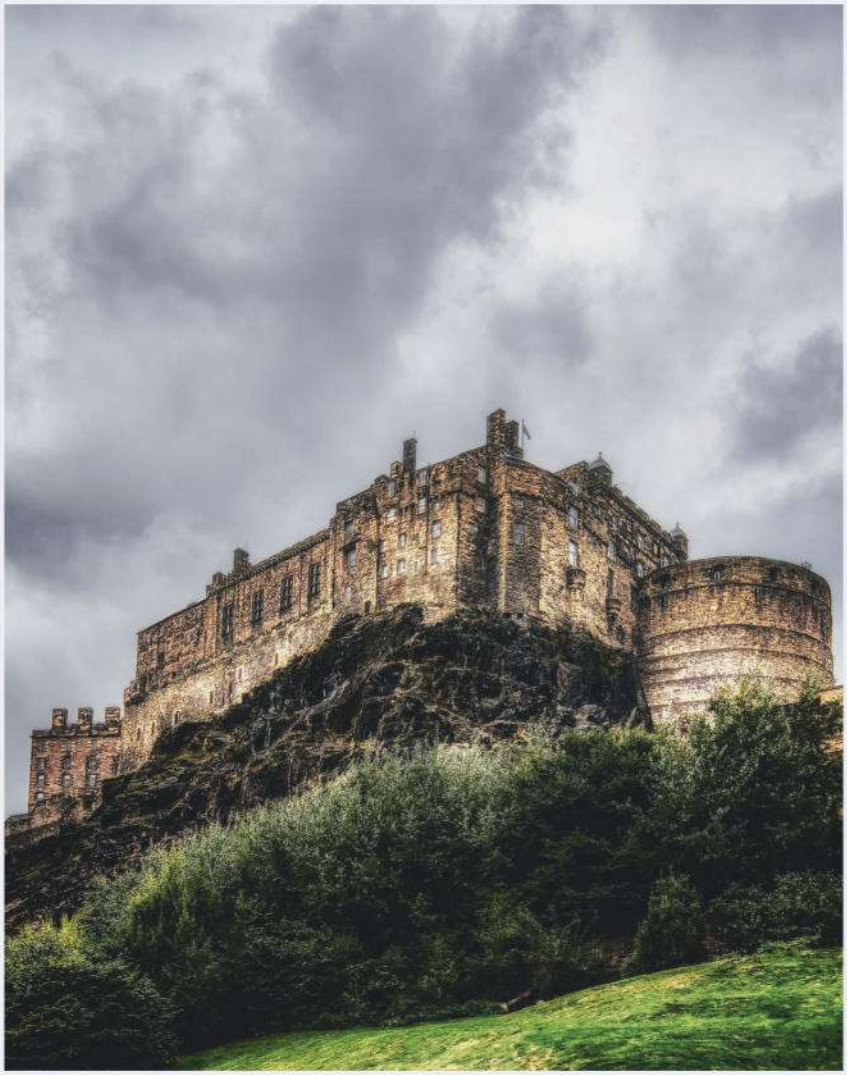
Yet, as I noticed with some disappointment when researching my

own *Haunted Edinburgh* (2008), very few compelling apparition sightings are registered nowadays in the heart of the city. A Freedom of Information Act request made in March 2022 revealed over 40 calls to Police Scotland concerning "the paranormal" including sounds from an Edinburgh house in June 2020 "which may be paranormal" (*Daily Record*, 31 Oct 2022). Haunted pubs such as Whistle Binkies and the Mitre routinely report ongoing footsteps, noises and unexplained object movements, while the 'Jinglin' Geordie' Bar takes its name supposedly from the rattling of ghostly coins in the pockets of the man believed to haunt it. But few visually perceived and well-defined apparition sightings arise, like a ghostly monk which appeared in 1972 to a civil servant in the High Street, or the phantom 'lady of quality' gliding around Charlotte Street in same decade. Mysterious figures are sometimes glimpsed at Mary King's Close today, but little more.

Just lately promising signs of a ghost revival in the suburbs and beyond the boundaries of the historic city emerge from the books in the *North Edinburgh Nightmares* series by a local writer John Tantallon, but the legend-filled historic centre seems ominously free of prowling spectres. Dr Paul Lee's nationwide survey (see **FT437:38-41**) prompted the question, 'Where have all the ghosts gone?' I was beginning to think Edinburgh's visual phantoms are an expiring race. Fortunately, I am now pleased to have all fears dispelled thanks to the welcome announcement in October 2024 from Edinburgh Castle, revealing a fresh crop of ghostly sightings, with details shared with the *Daily Record* (31 Oct 2024) in time for Hallowe'en.

Jacob Allison, 30, a guide at the Castle, has personally witnessed two apparitions, and colleagues with Historic Environment Scotland report several more. Jacob states his first ghost experience came just two months after starting work when he saw a shadowy man "with crossed arms, hunched down sitting on a chair" in their staff room. "My first thought was it was one of the mobility drivers having a snooze, so I opened the door again and there was no one there at all."

His second mysterious encounter followed when on duty overseeing the Honours of Scotland (the Scottish equivalent of the Crown Jewels) exhibited at the Castle. He states: "I saw the reflection of a young boy with short blonde hair wearing a red coat near the exit. It's a one-way system and I knew that he hadn't been in the room, so I went to check up on him, but he was nowhere to be seen."



K MITCH HODGE / UNSPLASH

ABOVE: A number of guides at Edinburgh Castle have reported seeing ghostly apparitions while working there, including a shadowy man, a young boy and a woman wearing a long yellow dress.

Another guide, Kristie McGowan, 34, witnessed what is probably the same apparition in the guide's changing room above when, on stepping into the room she noticed "a little blonde head peek round from the lockers wearing red."

Showing the tendency of normal consciousness to initially ascribe an ordinary explanation to an unusual perception, Kristie's first thought this must be another guide and she called out "Hi!" in greeting. On receiving no response, Kristie then walked over to find she was wholly alone in the room.

Even more striking was another sighting of a woman wearing a long gold or yellow dress. Again, at the beginning Kristie took the figure to be an ordinary human being, perhaps a visitor who had lingered, so said politely, "Sorry, excuse me, this room's closed now." The lady then looked directly at her with "a curious look" and Kristie noticed how the figure resembled a woman with "… very pale, fair skin and red hair, in her late 30s or early 40s" before the figure inexplicably vanishied in an instant.

A third guide, Craig Archibald-Shepherd, 40, has also reported seeing "someone in a long grey coloured skirt walking up the stairs just ahead of me" on the numinous date of New Year's Eve 2016-17. He says others working at the Castle – all women – have had similar experiences in precisely the same spot. New employees seem particularly favoured with sightings. Some speculate the figure is Mary of Guise, wife of James V and Queen of Scotland between 1538-1542. But any such identification must

TARTANQUEEN 21 / CREATIVE COMMONS

ANN TREHERNE

ABOVE LEFT: The Sir Arthur Conan Doyle Centre in Edinburgh. **ABOVE RIGHT**: The Centre's founder, Ann Treherne, experienced a wide variety of disturbing psychic phenomena in the building, including a malevolent 'thing' in the basement, which she documents in her new book *The Vortex* (below).

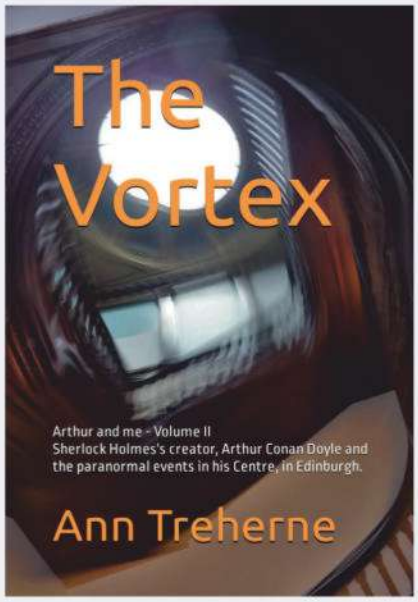
ultimately remain guesswork. Nonetheless, many would endorse Craig's observation: "There are some parts of the castle where the vibe is just odd."

Additionally, Jacob Allison and his manager also testify to hearing unexplained voices. These incidents occur in David's Tower, dating back to 1380, and initially were attributed to loudspeakers. Then the manager heard laughter, and they both swiftly realised that the speakers were not operating, a revelation Jacob recalls "made us both turn as white as sheets."

These accounts build on a long history of ghostly events centring on the Castle. In 1927, a shadowy figure and a spherical black mass suggestive of a cat were reported on a staircase. On 16 August 1952 Chief Warder of the Castle James Ogg saw "a cloaked man" prowling the Castle esplanade (*Psychic News*, 30 Aug 1952).

Playwright Ada Kay (1929-2024) in her book *Falcon* (1970) said she underwent a time-slip experience in the same area one night when she momentarily saw the rooftops of the city in mediæval times (however, she also considered herself the reincarnation of King James IV killed at the battle of Flodden in 1513).

Ann's husband was violently pushed by an unseen force on three separate occasions



Finally, a recent Castle Governor, Major General Alastair Bruce, reportedly encountered the curious behaviour of lights on his first night in post. He was awoken by lights turning on by themselves at 2am and sensed an uncanny atmosphere. In response he called out, "I'm Alastair Bruce, the new Governor of Edinburgh Castle. I love history." His introduction completed, seemingly in response, the lights then immediately switched off again!

Such a collection of reports from established staff is most welcome and illustrates a refreshing openness compared with reactions shown at some other sites by heritage custodians who adroitly deflect enquiries about ghosts or limit themselves to 'off the record' remarks.

A pleasant feature about these latest apparitions is they hold no terror for those occasionally encountering them. However, this is not true of all manifestations in Edinburgh, a fact luminously demonstrated in accounts first disclosed to me in October 2022 and now featuring in a book *The Vortex* by Ann Treherne, the founder of the Sir Arthur Conan Doyle Centre in Edinburgh.

I have described in a previous column

Ann Treherne's development into a gifted medium after undergoing a traumatic premonition of the Dunblane school massacre in March 1996 (**FT429:18-21**). In the aftermath, she was encouraged to advance with her abilities by psychical researcher Professor Archie Roy, eventually leading her to the belief she was being influenced by the spirit of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. She told this story in her book *Arthur and Me* (2020) and how it inspired her to found the Sir Arthur Conan Doyle Centre (SACDC) in Palmerston Place. Now in the sequel she makes public a series of disturbing psychic experiences suffered by herself and others over 2011-2012 during the establishment of the centre in an old Edinburgh townhouse. From the sound of footsteps, initial sightings of a bearded old man and a young girl during restoration work, the phenomena intensified into the inexplicable movement of heavy ladders and furniture. Singing was heard on the grand central staircase and a number of shaken builders quit.

Thereafter the haunting presence became increasingly hostile. Ann's husband Iain was violently pushed and manhandled by an unseen force on three separate occasions inside the building, sustaining injuries to his legs.

Ann then encountered for herself what she calls 'the thing' in the basement. She experienced the impression of a mobile amorphous presence, projecting a terrific sense of power, reminding her of a hurtling train displacing the air. She fled, overcome by the sensations of malevolence radiating from it, a presence she describes as "awful, disgusting, strong, powerful and aggressive"; at the time she also compared it to "slime". These experiences – extensively documented in her book – brought in investigators from the Scottish Society for Psychical Research (SSPR). During their first overnight vigil in 2012 the investigators found their infra-red monitoring sensors repeatedly activated in ways they were unable to explain.

Certain aspects of the encounter with 'the thing' brought to mind for me widely separated reports of dark figures conveying menace to percipients, like the shadowy figure appearing on a staircase at Brede Place, an ancient house in Sussex in the 1950s. (See *Here are Ghosts and Witches*, 1954, by J Wentworth Day). However, Ann explained her perception was that the presence lacked any defined form and projected a sense of primitive power or force without human characteristics.

Naturally, with such events occurring just as the centre opened its doors, Ann was fearful people would be put in danger and the fledgling centre could suffer

ABOVE: *Nationwide* reporter Glyn Worsnip outside 82 Richmond Road, Kingston. **LEFT**: One of the builders plagued by poltergeist phenomena while working in the buidling in 1976

irremediable reputational damage with herself ridiculed as "a medium afraid of ghosts".

Providentially, this never happened: the negative presence waned as the centre flourished. Today the SACDC thrives as a base and venue for spiritual practitioners, alternative therapists and healers and hosts regular Sunday morning Spiritualist services. Looking back, Ann considers, "... the presence of so many spiritual people doing spiritual work in the Centre has helped dissipate this energy; their collective good seemingly able to triumph over this negative intent in the basement."

The most affected portion now houses without problems the impressive and welcoming Alex Johnston Library, a treasure trove of volumes on paranormal and esoteric topics originally from the Theosophical Society of Scotland. Still, a few people do occasionally remark on an odd atmosphere in one basement room, formerly utilised for séances.

Stories of physically violent and threatening phantoms are known from Edinburgh houses in earlier years. At Blackett Place in the 1880s a ghost was blamed for pushing a woman downstairs, and many years later at a house in Learmouth Terrace lawyer and ghost hunter R MacDonald Robertson from Edinburgh Psychic College encountered a dark entity that approached "gasping and breathing deeply, shuffling closer all the time towards the bed" (*Psychic News*, 10 Feb 1962). Such an experience might potentially be explicable as sleep paralysis, but this hardly suffices with encounters in the daytime involving witnesses wide awake and on their feet, or the movement of ladders or furniture. Object displacements imply a targeted force, guided by some degree of purpose and intelligence and beyond the scope of any simple 'recording' or 'stone tape' hypothesis of ghosts.

This poltergeist-like targeting of building workers is recorded elsewhere, for instance at the infamous 'House of Suicides' at Montpelier Road, Ealing in Spring 1944 (**FT342:30-35**). Just as I was finishing this column, I noticed the release of a BBC Archive clip from 1976 to YouTube covering a disruptive renovation ghost dubbed 'Albert' occurring at 82 Richmond Road, Kingston. Builders recounted incidents of bombardment by nails and metal bars, one worker hospitalised after a ladder was pushed from under him, and another pulled across a cellar floor. Rather mockingly, reporter Glyn Worsnip (later a presenter on Esther Rantzen's *That's Life*) winked that 'Albert' might have more about him of the canny than the uncanny, a ruse by builders to excuse themselves for failing to hit their completion deadline. But I don't think that can explain all such cases.

BBC Archive 1976: *Nationwide* visits a 'haunted' building site: www.bbc.co.uk/videos/cqxw927r4yvo

STRANGE CONTINENT

ULRICH MAGIN brings Europe's weird news, from Slovakian lake monsters to Spanish cultists

SAGA OR TRUE STORY?

The *Sverris Saga* was written by Karl Jónsson, an Icelandic abbot of the Thingeyrar monastery, who lived in Norway where he witnessed the rise and rule of King Sverre Sigurðarson. It is assumed the saga was completed immediately after Sverre's death in 1202, as historical sources from soon after that year already refer to it.

The *Sverris Saga* is a detailed account of the King's life and reign. Sverre ascended the Norwegian throne in the late 12th century, a period marked by fierce power struggles, especially between Sverre's own army and a rival faction known as the Baglers who were supported by the Roman Catholic Church.

According to the saga, during the siege of Sverresborg in 1197, the attackers threw a body into the castle's well to poison the water supply. In this, the saga says, they had success and defeated King Sverre.

In 1938, archæologists found human bones in the well, and now, a team led by Michael D Martin, a professor at the Norwegian University of Science and Technology, has carried out DNA analysis on the remains and "determined the man's death to have occurred in 1197… This is the first time that a person described in these historical texts has actually been found." The DNA came from a tooth and offered the researchers further insights. The man was 30 to 40 years old and probably had blue eyes and blonde or light brown hair. His ancestry was linked to the Vest-Agder region of southern Norway, which means he might have been one of the attackers.

"Although we cannot prove that the remains recovered from the well in the ruins of Sverresborg Castle belong to the person mentioned in the *Sverris Saga*, the evidence supports this conclusion," the researchers said in their paper, published in *iScience*.

Martin and his team hope to apply their methods to other historical figures. They are particularly interested in St Olaf, the patron saint of Norway, who is believed to be buried near Trondheim Cathedral. "If his remains are found, one could attempt to physically describe him and trace his ancestry using genetic sequencing."

The claim made by the newspaper that Norwegian sagas recount the historical truth is perhaps not really supported by a find such as this, but the story is interesting nevertheless. *abendblatt.de, 28 Oct 2024.*

NTNU UNIVERSITY MUSEUM

ABOVE: The remains of the man in the well of King Sverresborg Castle were recovered in 1938.

During the siege, the attackers threw a body into the well

ANIMAL DEATHS

The German Baltic coast around the island of Rügen suffered a mass death of grey seals in October 2024. From the beginning of the month until mid-October, 20 dead animals washed ashore between Lobbe and Thiessow, their cause of death a complete mystery. At the end of October, the number of dead animals had risen to 44. Grey seals are a protected species, and the Ministry of Environment of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern raised the alarm: "We are really worried." Minister Till Backhaus said: "They are all adult animals without any signs of injuries, and well fed." The carcasses were transported to the German Oceanographic Museum in Stralsund where Dr Judith Denkinger, curator of marine mammals, explained: "We have sent samples from eight dead animals to laboratories so far. All have tested negative for infectious diseases. We have dissected three animals at the Marine Museum. These animals showed symptoms of drowning. They had water in their lungs and some of their stomachs were filled with undigested fish… Vomit was also discovered in the lungs of one animal." The museum concluded that the seals had been caught in fishing nets and drowned. Fishermen have a different explanation, and a conspiracy theory as well: the animals are being killed by the noise of the new and locally unpopular Liquified Natural Gas Terminal. *nordkurier.de, 17 Oct, 14 Nov 2024.*

STRANGE CREATURES

Lake monsters are ubiquitous – I've collected examples here from Spain and Italy, and now we have one from Slovakia. Swiss cryptozoologist Andreas Trottman found a Polish TV newscast on recent surfacings of "a large, mysterious creature" in Vel'ké Hincovo Pleso lake in the northern Tatra mountains. The lake lies at a height of 1,946m (6,385ft), is small in size (some 750 x 350 yards), and 180ft (55m) in depth. The lake was artificially stocked with trout in 1966 and is covered with ice for up to 270 days a year. When Pavol Jackovi and his friends went for a hike, they rested on a rock some 150m (164 yards) above the lake. As he told Slovakian TV station RTV: "That was the moment when I saw something rising to the surface of the lake. It must have been something very big for me to see it from that height. My guess is that it must have been at least three to four metres long." He was too surprised to think of taking a picture, but added: "The eyewitness testimony of three people cannot be disputed. Probably, if I were alone, I would have said I was dreaming. But we didn't dream this, that's for sure."

Mountain rescuer and writer Jaroslav Švorc said: "They confirmed and literally swore that they had seen some strange creature, like a huge fish, but they couldn't identify it." A lively discussion followed. Milan Štefánik from a nearby tourist resort said: "I believe that these guys saw it. I am now hearing various rumours that a marena whitefish may have grown to gigantic proportions." The marena whitefish, a Baltic

species with which many lakes are stocked, can reach a maximum length of 130cm (4ft). Even stranger was the idea of Jozef Hybler from the Mountain Protection Administration (TANAP) who initially thought it might have been "a shoal of sturgeon" (from where?), but then changed his mind: "We have rejected the theory because sturgeon live in warmer waters and the lake's altitude of 1,946m (2,128 yards) is too high up for them to survive. At the moment we are not planning any sonar or other survey of the lake. There is no reliable relevant evidence yet." *www.tvp.pl, 8 Oct 2024.*

Meanwhile, the Tarragona crocodile (see **FT452:22**) was not the only one seen this year in Spain. In the Vena River, part of the Duero Rover system, a "baby crocodile" some 70cm (28in) in length was seen by several people in mid-July 2024. The witnesses informed the Environmental Unit of the Municipal Police, who traced the animal, which appeared to be motionless. Which it was – it was a real, but stuffed specimen. Helped by firefighters, the agents removed the animal from the river. It is believed that the owner of the stuffed crocodile had thrown it into the river "without calculating that his decision was going to cause unnecessary social alarm." *elcorreo.com, 19 July 2024.*

MINI ABC

Alien Big Cats have always been reliable visitors to this column, but sightings have become very rare of late; indeed, online searches have only produced a single report, in Italy, although not of a very big cat. "The infamous panther which is reularly spotted in Irpinia has not returned," said an Italian news outlet, but one of the readers, Gabriel, sent in a picture of a strange cat he had spotted in Via Scandone in Atripalda. "What intrigued the young man was the size of the animal, which looked more like a large dog with feline movements." Gabriel posted his picture to a group of animal experts and they concluded it was a serval, an African wild cat kept by some people as pets. *irpinianews.it, 19 Aug 2024.*

ABOVE LEFT: The diminutive ABC snapped in Italy has been identified as a serval.
ABOVE RIGHT: The late Antonio Gómez Martín, Spanish cult leader and con-artist.

SPANISH CULT CON

After a near-death experience, Antonio Gómez Martín declared he had started to talk to Jesus Christ on a daily basis and later said he himself was Christ. He started preaching on YouTube, published an eBook, and around 2018 began to hold seminars across Spain, spreading his mixture of "home grown psychology and self-help manuals" (as the Spanish national paper ABC puts it) and attracted many followers. Gómez Martín founded communities in Cáceres, Jaraíz de la Vera and Hervás, and is now accused of having conned his supporters out of several million euros and to have amassed weapons valued at around 73,000 euros (£70,300). He owned Internet shops, and his eBook Now You Are Home can still be bought on Amazon.

Gómez Martín claimed in his videos that he had belonged to the Spanish Special Forces, that he had been an escort for a head of state, a sniper, a legionnaire and a paratrooper. These, the Guardia Civil said, were all lies. "He hooked his followers with his charisma, listened to them and made them feel special with a speech in which he mixed self-help and pseudo-spiritual messages, a kind of sui generis religion with Jesus Christ at the centre," the Spanish paper Hoy wrote. "Then he asked for money." And, as we know from the history of any religion, the followers gave willingly. Some gave all of the little money as they had, becoming dependent on the group. The newspapers were full of heart-breaking stories of people who had joined the group only to lose all their possessions. The donations were distributed to the private accounts of relatives of the group leaders.

But the situation became difficult when Gómez Martín started to believe he should defend his group from unbelievers. He assembled some 80 weapons, telling followers that acquiring such an arsenal would allow them to combat the powers that be. "We must be prepared, armed, because we are bringing a message that the Church does not want and the world is angry and those in power will attack us."

He convinced his followers to obtain weapon licenses and train in the use of guns. In the end, the group had acquired illegal weapons, decommissioned military weapons, compressed air weapons, silencers and 7,600 cartridges of different calibres. There were plans to barricade the house in Hervás.

Gómez Martín died in January 2024 of a heart attack when agents were already monitoring his activities following a complaint from a former follower. Mari Luz, his wife, continued as leader of the group, telling them that the spirit of her dead husband continued to speak to her from another plane of existence.

In mid-October, the Spanish Guardia Civil arrested Mari Luz along with Gómez Martín's son and his right-hand man and investigated another eight group members for scamming more than one million euros from cult members. "This is the first time we have found this association between weapons and sectarian activities," the official researchers explained.

The verdict is not out yet, but authorities think the religious cult was started as a scam early on. *hoy.es, 14+15 Oct; abc.es, web.de, 15 Oct 2024.*

100 YEARS AGO

The idea of a stranger coming to a village where someone is missing and then taking his or her place has been well-explored in cinema; one thinks of *The Return of Martin Guerre* (1982) and *Sommersby* (1993). However, such archetypical tales sometimes almost sounded true. In January 1925, we learn from Hungary: "In recent days, a young man appeared on the Sczilváspuszta next to Dombrovár, went to the tenant Pálinkas and said that he was her son who had gone to war in 1914 and had been missing ever since. The woman actually thought she recognised the boy as her son, was of course delighted, bought new clothes and linen for him and also provided him with plenty of money. After two days the 'recovered man' disappeared. But soon he was picked up in Pécs by the police, who discovered that they were dealing with an impostor whose real name was Philipp Schmidt. It was further established that he had no job or position and lived by plundering gullible people. Schmidt was arrested." *Pester Lloyd, 4 Jan 1925.*

THE CONSPIRASPHERE

When Luigi Mangione gunned down United Healthcare CEO Brian Thompson, conspiracy talk soon turned to integers and eyebrows, but **NOEL ROONEY** wonders if it all adds up...

NUMBER THEORY

"Better is the poor that walketh in his uprightness, than he that is perverse in his ways, though he be rich" – Proverbs, 28:6

On the rare occasions when I refer to biblical sources, the text is usually the point of the exercise. If you are familiar with the Bible, however, you will know that this particular text is not unique; the sentiment it expresses can be found regularly throughout the Old and New Testaments to the point where it becomes a biblical truism. The secret here is that little number at the end: that and the game of Monopoly.

There are times when a sensational event, a public assassination, say, provokes a reaction that tends to the mystical end of conspiracy theory; that murky, liminal space where predestination and coincidence play a role at least as great as the protagonist. Perhaps this is a way of camouflaging our prurient fascination; perhaps it disguises our secret approval for a crime under a façade of obliquity. And when this happens it is often numbers that people turn to, as if the message they offer is purer than mere human motives.

The Mangione affair is already fading to the news margins, though no doubt it will find new traction when the case comes to trial. In the meantime, two streams of thought are keeping the event, and its perpetrator, in the limelight: first, the apparent sympathy for Liugi Mangione on the part of a large number of observers; and second, the number 286. Neither is quite a conspiracy theory in the classical sense, but both views clearly tend in that direction.

The outpouring of support for Mangione's actions surprised the media and alarmed an entire industry.

PENNSYLVANIA POLICE DEPARTMENT

A large amount of Monopoly money was in his rucksack

And that support is spread across the political and demographic spectrum. Progressives, usually more likely to cry 'conspiracy theory' than subscribe to one, are on board in numbers, though I imagine there is some discomfort about the identity of their fellow travellers. For the health insurance industry, I suspect the widespread sympathy for Mangione's actions is actually more frightening than the shooting of Brian Thompson, the unfortunate CEO of United Healthcare.

Sympathy of the Robin Hood variety is not unknown and it is not, in my view, remotely conspiracist; so what of the number that appears more or less everywhere the name Mangione is mentioned?

286 is not an obviously sinister number, but, in terms of its numerical properties, it is both odious and apocalyptic; which is to say that its binary digits add up to an odd number and the (very definitely sinister) number 666 can be derived as a sub-string, if one has the patience to calculate 2 to the power of 286. (I didn't find this out from a conspiracy site, but I'm betting it won't be long before it appears, now the cat's out of the bag.)

One could argue that the binary thing is tangentially apt, since the aftermath (pun unintended, but I rather like it) has been an online phenomenon; however, the real – if that's an appropriate term for anything that happens online – significance of 286 is in its teasing association with Mangione, his actions before and during the shooting, and perhaps, ultimately, his motivation for attacking and killing an executive apparently chosen at random to represent an easily despised corporate class. One might say the victim was odious by association and the perpetrator apocalyptic by design.

Mangione made 286 posts on X (a platform on which his cousin follows 286 accounts); he was apprehended at a MacDonald's restaurant exactly 286 miles from the scene of the crime (if one allows for a certain amount of conspiratorial licence), having left New York on Highway 286; his X account profile features a Pokémon character, Breloom, that is number 286 on the Pokémon list. It is also claimed that 286 relates to the game of Monopoly, though it's not clear quite how, but a large amount of Monopoly money was found in his rucksack after the shooting.

The kicker, though, the iteration that binds the others into significance, is that 286 refers to a code used in the medical insurance industry to deny payment. The code indicates a time limit on appeals against denial of payment and there, for those with eyes to see, lies the motivation for Mangione's actions. There is no evidence that he was the victim of a Code 286 denial, despite vague mutterings about a back operation that may or may not have gone awry, but its existence is persuasive for some. And if further proof is needed, in the US, National Insurance Day (why do they even have such a thing?) falls on 28 June: QED.

I find myself thinking that a lot of potential conspiracy theory has been buried under this avalanche of integers. What persuaded Mangione that he was the appointed avenger of a very specific class of victims? Was this yet another excursion of the Lone Nut Gun Club or did he have help? How did he know exactly when and where Thompson would appear? Was Thompson chosen randomly or is there some larger scheme afoot?

The garbled homage to the Unabomber that passes for a manifesto is unconvincing; it has a copy and paste feel to it. 'Deny, defend, depose' (not quite *Delay, Deny, Defend*) etched on the bullets feels contrived. An amusing Reddit spat between hairdressers focused on Mangione's eyebrow growth rates and speculated that he had been replaced by a less facially hirsute body double; a hangover from those halcyon days when a photo could be trusted, perhaps, but no more than a red herring here.

We are left with a set of questions not so much unanswered as unasked. Until, that is, the police or lawyers disclose the amount of Monopoly money in the bag and we are back down the (quite probably wrong) rabbit hole.

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PEOPLE'S DAY OF DEATH 2024

IAN SIMMONS reports from last November's ceremony.

ABOVE: Participants in the 2024 People's Day of Death. **BELOW & FACING PAGE:** People could attend various 'Skools', including the 'Fortean Times Skool of Strange Deaths' in which people interpreted stories of unusual passings from the magazine's long-running 'Strange Deaths' section. **BOTTOM:** FT's News Editor in his Hi-Vis.

Evolving out of the Toxteth Day of the Dead (see **FT441:20-23**), the People's Day of Death takes place on 23 November every year. This is the latest iteration of Bill Drummond and Jimmy Cauty's post-KLF K2 Plant Hire Project, The People's Pyramid, which is a funerary structure built out of bricks to which 23g of a dead person's ashes have been fused to produce a "Brick of Mu", a process known as MuMufication. Each year, up to 26 new bricks are ceremonially added to the Pyramid on 23 November and this is intended to continue until the Pyramid is 23 feet high (there are a lot of 23s involved, which hark back to Drummond and Cauty's original inspiration, the *Illuminatus* trilogy, and before that, William Burroughs). The completed pyramid will contain 34,592 bricks – a goal that is not expected to be reached for 999 years. This, as the K2 Plant Hire website puts it, "is a new form of memorialisation, a funeral ceremony for like-minded people irrespective of creed or background". It is very much a reinvention of community death rituals, which in Britain have largely followed a highly commercialised version of Victorian conventions for well over 100 years. This is neither commercialised nor conventional.

2023's event, *The Krossing*, saw

It is very much a reinvention of community death rituals

the end of the Pyramid's first phase, when it was ceremonially transported from its temporary location in Toxteth to a longer term home at Future Yard in Birkenhead via a Mersey Ferry and a colourful procession. The transition to The People's Day of the Dead sees the event become more community oriented and less associated with Drummond and Cauty, who were not present this year, and it was presented in association with DIY clothing brand Sports Banger. This indicates a growing maturity and independence, which is a good sign that the Pyramid has a long-term future and may just make it to that 999 year mark. It remained, though, helmed by the unflappable Daisy Campbell, who was sporting very fetching glittery eyewear this year.

As at last year's event, the day started with "Skools", held this time in Liverpool's fabled city centre Adelphi Hotel. These involved various practical, creative or ritual activities relating to the day's business, including the Skool of Builders, dedicated to the practical aspects of the Pyramid building, the Skool of Howling, where you could, erm, learn how to howl, and the Skool of Fog Horns, where people made fog horns out of traffic cones to blow later in the day. The Skool of Missed Messages gave you the opportunity to write a message saying something you wished you had said to someone now departed, which would then by transmitted by serendipitous means, such as tying it to a cat or burning it during a magick ritual. I was given one to transmit that is now hidden in a book about different interpretations of the afterlife in a friend's second hand bookshop. I also ran the Fortean Times Skool of Strange Deaths, dedicated to creating The Skroll of Strange Deaths. This involved participants choosing one of the stories from the FT Strange Deaths page, then interpreting it on a long scroll of paper using coloured pens. It could be a poem, another story, a drawing or anything triggered by reading about one of our deaths, but most people chose to draw something. The man who came to an untimely end through lighting a large firework on top of his head proved particularly popular, but other deaths participants felt moved to interpret included being crushed by wheels of cheese, flattened by a dismembered cow while urinating beside a railway line and mangled by a vegetable processing robot. Daisy drew her favourite, remembered from childhood reading of FT, the Spanish man killed by a rock fall while sexually abusing a chicken, originally published complete

with a slightly dubious photo. The Skool of Mu-seology was working with the local Whitworth Art Gallery to start documenting The People's Day of the Dead, and they have noted our "Skroll" as a potential object to collect.

The assembled participants seemed to be causing a degree of bewilderment to both hotel staff and other guests, particularly those turning up for what looked to be a particularly swanky wedding, as we cheerfully milled about the atrium, eccentrically dressed in various interpretations of the Day's dress code, "Hi-Vis", preparing for the procession. Joined by many others who had not taken part in the Skools, we assembled on the Adelphi steps in the late afternoon's gathering darkness before heading off across the city to the ferry terminal, guided by local participants holding imaginatively created lamps made from milk cannisters hung from the end of poles. Foghorns were blown, howls were howled, and several hundred fluorescently dressed individuals marched apace through the pedestrianised streets of Liverpool to the collective amazement of shoppers, stopping traffic as they streamed across the occasional road, pausing only to carry out several circuits of the city's Christmas tree.

Arriving at the terminal, bricks were ceremonially issued to the friends and family of those whose ashes they contained, which marked a change in tone. Our crossing of the Mersey, standing in for the Styx, conducted on a commuter ferry instead of a boat rowed by a hooded figure, was accessed by a QR code rather than the traditional coin, but had a deep solemnity none the less. As Storm Bert's first blasts rocked the vessel, participants stood in silence for the crossing, with the bearers holding their bricks, apart from a minute midstream when we shouted the names of our own dead into the darkness. A more reverent and subdued group disembarked to process through industrial Birkenhead to Future Yard, where the 20 bricks containing this year's MuMufied were taken to the pyramid, one by one, by their friends and relatives, as eulogies were read for each. They were then cemented in place to join those who had been added in previous years, while the foghorns sounded.

With the core ritual over, the evening took on a more celebratory tone as Sports Banger staged a K2 Plant Hire fashion show featuring some imaginative performance interludes and dance music was played by DJs working from inside the KLF ice cream van, followed by an afterparty in Future Yard's indoor performance spaces. It proved by turns a fascinating, solemn, invigorating and celebratory event, and one where *Fortean Times* had an appreciative audience, many of whom had been readers over the years and fondly shared their favourite stories. As a successful reinvention of one of life's landmark rituals, The People's Day of Death has few parallels.

MYTHCONCEPTIONS

by Mat Coward

287: NAUGHTY CORPSES

ILLUSTRATIONS BY HUNT EMERSON

The myth

It is illegal to die in Parliament.

The "truth"

Often seen in lists of daft legislation, this story is remarkably widely believed. Putting aside the practicalities for a moment – how would a ban be enforced? What would the penalty be for breaking it? – no one has ever succeeded in locating the relevant legislation. What makes this myth special to forteans is that it is based on another myth: that anyone who dies in a royal palace (such as Parliament) is entitled to a state funeral. So that if a cleaner suffered a fatal miasma attack while scrubbing the House of Lords loos, the state would have to give her a full formal send-off with all the expense and bother that would involve, not to mention the road closures and the disrupted TV schedules. To avoid this, goes the logic, no one's allowed to die in the palaces in the first place. Needless to say, that law doesn't exist either. A variation on the myth, which has presumably evolved to make it less incredible, states that anyone who does die in Parliament will not be formally declared dead until they've been removed from the parliamentary estate, so that Parliament is not recorded as the place of death.

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Disclaimer

Obviously, if we're wrong, and you can quote the Act and the clause that says so, we'd be dead excited to hear from you.

Mythchaser

The idea of banning people from dying in a particular place or time is, as the lawyers say, "absurd on its face". However, like most absurd things, it does in fact happen – usually in laws passed by local politicians to protest against a lack of resources (medical care, for instance, or burial space) allocated by a superior level of government. But can anyone provide details of a case in which such a law has actually led to legal proceedings?

A bullshit of drones...

NIGEL WATSON takes a look at the recent drone panic and wonders if we've all gone crazy...

Help! The drones of doom are coming to take us away. Starting in November 2024 there was a veritable invasion of the blighters in the East of England, then in New Jersey spreading to New York, Texas, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Massachusetts, Oklahoma, California and Florida (see pp.14-15). As witnesses reported seeing them manoeuvring in a manner beyond the capabilities of known technology, were the drones some new secret weapon? Or were they of some more mysterious and esoteric origin?

One New Jersey witness said: "To me, they're looking for something. My concern is we have ammunition bases here in New Jersey." Another said the drones were being sent up by al-Qaeda.

President-elect Donald Trump made a statement about the situation: "The Government knows what is happening... and they'd be better off saying what it is. Our military knows. Our president knows. And for some reason, they want to keep people in suspense. I can't imagine it's the enemy because if it were the enemy, even if they were late, they'd blast it."

I can see President Trump swatting drones from the top of the Empire State Building like a modern-day King Kong. If the drone operators – whether of terrestrial or non-terrestrial origin – have any sense they'd never return – but us forteans know that will never happen.

On one X posting (viewed by over six million people), Georgia Representative Marjorie Taylor Greene, a noted right-wing conspiracy theorist, noted: "The Government is in control of the drones and refuses to tell the American people what is going on. It really is that bad."

A statement released by the Department of Homeland Security, the FBI, the Federal Aviation Administration and the Department of Defense, on 17 December, noted:

"Having closely examined the technical data and tips from concerned citizens, we assess that the sightings to date include a combination of lawful commercial drones, hobbyist drones, and law enforcement drones, as well as manned fixed-wing aircraft, helicopters, and stars mistakenly reported as drones. We have not identified anything anomalous and do not assess the activity to date to present a national security or public safety risk over the civilian airspace in New Jersey or other states in the northeast."

Inevitably on social media there were plenty of suggestions and explanations for the sightings. One poster knew that: "They are nuclear detection drones searching for smuggled nuclear bombs. FACT!!!!! Telling us would've panicked a lot of people."

"The Government knows what's happening... and they'd be better off saying what it is"

The nuclear angle was reinforced by talk of an Iranian "mothership" off the coast of New Jersey, and of a container of medical grade radiation going missing. No-less a personage than Uri Geller on his Facebook page gave the nuclear theory full beans:

"BREAKING: Intel from a verified high-level source with TOP SECRET Special Access clearance just dropped BOMBSHELL info to us on the mysterious drones being seen across the US.

"These are OUR drones, tracking gamma rays linked to possible WMDs [Weapons of Mass Destruction] in a MASSIVE counter-terror operation! The 'Office of Global Access' (OGA) – a shadowy 3-letter agency – has deployed advanced surveillance assets to hunt for a stray nuke or mass-casualty weapon hidden on the East and West coasts."

Uri continued: "Sources say this could involve a submarine breach of our SOSUS warning nets or a WMD hidden in a cargo container or vehicle. The stakes are HIGH, and the government's silence speaks volumes – they fear public panic."

South Carolina's Representative Nancy Mace was willing to consider that the drones might be from outer space, saying: "I hope that it's not our adversaries or something from outside the universe, because I have real concerns that, like, if these drones are from Iran or China, like some of the rumours have been, I pray that they're ours, but we should also know why they're out there. Like, are they looking for radiation? Are they looking for a missing nuclear warhead?"

LEFT: A typically fuzzy image of a drone captured by a New Jersey resident last November,

Tom DeLonge, of 'To The Stars...' fame, posted on his Facebook page and invoked the ghost of Skinwalker Ranch:

"The drones that have been spotted, can hover for six hours, and then disappear once they are spotted. This is why it's been hard to get facts from any US Agency. Some of them even move into the ocean, and then back up to the air. Which is called 'transmedium travel.' A very hard thing to do.

"There is a good chance that these things could potentially be 'mimicking' other aircraft, and this even happened more recently in situations at Skinwalker Ranch years ago..."

A drone-themed Reddit forum was deluged with conspiracy theories and sightings to such an extent that its moderator, "Nanosauromo", was forced to resign since he could no longer stem what he called "the tide of dumbness." He regarded the theories and sightings as "all bullshit."

Robert Sheaffer on his Bad UFOs blog took a more sober view of the subject:

"The point needs to be made that there are many different kinds of 'drones', of different origin and purpose. Some belong to the military, some belong to law enforcement, others to civilians. Some have horizontal propellers, enabling them to hover in one place. Others are more like conventional fixed-wing aircraft, but smaller because they do not carry a pilot (like the RQ-7). As is the case with UFOs, identifying or 'solving' one series of drone sightings does not necessarily have any bearing on other sightings. However, the 'solved' drone incidents described below are very instructive of what is happening in some cases.

"Something isn't right here, other than the usual incoherent reporting. I want to know WHY the military has never brought down, or recovered, one of these supposed drones. For that matter, I don't think they have ever even tried! Surely the military has every right to bring down any unidentified

DPA PICTURE ALLIANCE / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

ABOVE: Uri Geller weighed in with the theory that US drones were "tracking gamma rays linked to possible WMDs". **BELOW**: Robert Bartholomew believed we were seeing a social panic "triggered by fear and uncertainty".

and unauthorised craft encroaching on its territory, and has the means to do so."

One Facebook commentator answered Sheaffer's question with: "The US Government knows they cannot be shot down or chased away. The joke is on them! Anyone with a mind capable of critical thinking might just come to the same conclusion."

It is also worth noting Sheaffer's point that there are numerous types of drone operated by lots of different agencies. 33rd Frame in a YouTube video entitled "An FPV [First Person View] Pilot's take on the New Jersey drone scare" asserts that the Government should know the identity of a drone and its owner, as you are required to register a drone with the Federal Aviation Administration if it weighs more than 230g (0.55lb). So far, more than a million drones have been registered and thousands of them are operated every day. From this, 33rd Frame concludes that: "It's the US Government running an operation. Or a defense industry agency running an operation that has already been approved by the Government... any unknown drones would have been shot down by now."

A Facebook commentator put the subject into a wider social context:

"This drone hysteria is just another manifestation of a long American tradition of national panics that began with the Salem Witch Trials and has outbreaks almost every decade or so... aliens, Communists, Illuminati, Masonic plots, Satanist pædophile rings... Chinese weather balloons. It reveals Americans as a quaint superstitious lot. Highly amusing."

Robert Bartholomew, author of numerous authoritative books on social panics, notes:

"Just as mysterious lights over New Jersey and surrounding states were once attributed to German spies in aeroplanes in a series of UFO scares after the outbreak of World War I, today's sightings are shaped by similar fears of espionage and new technologies – the fear of new technologies and foreigners.

"These panics may have occurred over 100 years apart, but they are rooted in the same anxieties and driven by mass communications. Once the news media and social media sound the alarm as to the presence of mysterious, menacing lights in the night, people are motivated to scan the sky to confirm or deny what they are hearing.

"Drones have been a part of American life for many years. Ordinarily, people don't pay much attention to their presence, but with more people staring at the sky for longer periods, they are more likely to notice objects they previously hadn't noticed or paid attention to.

"All social panics are triggered by fear and uncertainty. It is the job of the researcher to examine the background and identify the anxieties that are driving it. In this instance, current geopolitical tensions with Russia, China, and Iran, appear to have contributed to a sense of distrust and vulnerability. Another factor may be a distrust of our own Government.

"Humans also tend to project their beliefs and fears onto ambiguous stimuli. As a result, the sky becomes a Rorschach Inkblot Test where people often see what they expect to see."

Carl Grove, who was one of the first to study the British 1909 phantom airship scare, told me:

"There are certainly some very odd features about the wave of drone sightings (first reported near me at nearby USAF bases) in the US. If the intel people or the Air Force were worried about this it wouldn't have been difficult to bring them down. In fact, in the US they have routinely taken down drones flying into sensitive areas; drones in the States are fitted with some kind of software that enables them to do this easily. On the other hand, if they have something to do with this as part of some long range strategy, they would obviously refrain from doing this. The fact that this is happening at one of the most dangerous times in US history, and that they seem to be heading for some official statement about UAPs, plus the fact that several major TV shows such as *Skinwalker* and *Contact* are releasing some very dramatic evidence about it all, all seem to be relevant.

"Given the evidence that we already have about the 1890s US and 1909 UK cases, and maybe the later 1930s cases, one wonders whether anyone in US intelligence at those times was taking an interest. While I am pretty sure that Roswell and some other famous cases were basically faked to cover up crashes in classified programmes, there are still plenty of highly significant cases in which extremely strong and puzzling evidence was presented, notably in the French wave of 1954 and many South American cases over the decades."

Brett Holman on his Airminded blog, notes that this scare has echoes of the 2019 drone panic in the American Midwest, the Gatwick scare of 2018 and further back in time to the British scares of 1909 and 1913 and the Australian 1918 phantom airship scares. He also observes that the reporting of an Iranian "mothership" is pertinent:

"Just by virtue of having been made, the claim serves to supply a physical link between the drones at home and a foreign, hostile power, as well as constructing it as a military operation. The lack of any clear motive or strategic aim, let alone actual threat, is a feature, not a bug, as it permits and indeed encourages worst-case scenario thinking. As always, mystery aircraft are the projections of our hopes and fears onto the not-so-empty skies above."

Ufologist Martin Kottmeyer notes: "I do think this is a flap akin to what we used to have in the Fifties, Sixties, to 1973. Lots of confusion and misidentifications with paranoiac themes. Many sightings are simply planes. Some people are just having fun. Whether there is anything 'real' in the sense of some group doing something with a clandestine motive seems increasingly doubtful. The emotional environment seems to have swamped any hope of trying to understand things via a simple explanatory narrative. People became crazy, perhaps."

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TURN OUT THE LIGHTS

CAPTAIN MAINWARING, PARANORMAL INVESTIGATOR

Was Arthur Lowe a nascent Fox Mulder? ANDREW T SMITH dons his television archæologist hat and goes in search of a long-lost ITV series that saw Coronation Street character Leonard Swindley opening his very own X-Files in 1960s Britain…

Winter, 1967. A dark and wind-swept evening envelops a farmhouse on the Yorkshire Moors. Inside, a hushed silence descends upon a circle of table-tilters keen to contact the beyond. Asked to knock once for 'yes' and twice for 'no', a restless spirit is able to communicate a warning: someone in this room is destined to die. One man at the table has his doubts… a brave and stoic investigator… a figure determined to get to the bottom of a seemingly paranormal mystery… and that man is… Captain Mainwaring?

Well, Arthur Lowe, anyway. On Friday 6 February 1967, television viewers tuned in to ITV for the final episode of *Turn Out The Lights*, a six-part comedy drama series that featured the actor as an investigator of the supernatural alongside his partner in deduction, Wally Hunt, played by Robert Dorning. Though they didn't know it at the time, those watching at home were about to bid farewell to a character they had spent seven years getting to know. Even less likely than the idea of Arthur Lowe as a nascent Fox Mulder was the fact that *Turn Out The Lights* was not just a spin-off from an earlier programme, but that said programme – *Pardon the Expression* – was itself a spin-off of an even earlier series. More surprising than that? This earlier series was the soap opera *Coronation Street!*

So, how did one character make the transition from the ensemble of a kitchen sink soap opera, to a sitcom of his own, then to a paranormal comedy drama?

The character of Leonard Swindley first stepped onto the cobbles of Britain's longest running television soap during the show's very first week on air. Introduced as the chairman of the Glad Tidings Mission Hall Committee, he immediately came into conflict with legendary battle-axe Ena Sharples, whom he threatened with eviction should she continue to frequent the disreputable Rovers Return.

LEFT: Arthur Lowe and Robert Dorning on the cover of *TV Times* in January 1967. **BELOW:** Pat Phoenix, Arthur Lowe and Eileen Derbyshire in *Coronation Street*.

Lowe had made his first appearance on television back in 1951, but this was the part that would catapult him to widespread recognition. Despite the fact that an actors' union strike led to his not appearing in the series for almost half a year from December 1961, the pompous but well-meaning Swindley became an audience favourite – whether battling Ena, haphazardly managing the local branch of Gamma Garments or ineffectually romancing mousy Emily Bishop.

"I believe people love Swindley because they can identify with him," Lowe told the *Sunday Mirror*, "or rather with the situations he gets into. Strangely enough, much of his appeal is to young people. Most of my fan mail comes from children. I think to them Swindley represents authority being knocked down. They identify him with their fathers or headmasters. They can laugh at Swindley but not, of course, at their fathers and headmasters. It's not malicious laughter. They are very fond of him." [1]

By 1965, Lowe was ready to move on from the grind of a twice-weekly soap opera. ITV bosses, however, were determined that this would not be the end of Leonard Swindley. A compromise was reached – though the character would bid farewell to his friends on *Coronation Street* in May, he would return to the nation's screens in June in a series of his very own.

THE POMPOUS BUT WELL-MEANING SWINDLEY BECAME AN AUDIENCE FAVOURITE

KITCHEN SINK TO SHOP FLOOR

Pardon the Expression, named for a phrase Swindley would frequently utter after using the wrong turn of phrase, differed from *Coronation Street* in one major respect. Far

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ITV / SHUTTERSTOCK

ABOVE LEFT: "The Ghost of Batsworth Castle" saw Swindley and his manager Wally Hunt facing a haunting in a country house. **ABOVE RIGHT:** Swindley finds himself caught up in the world of espionage in a two-part story called "Thunderfinger". **BELOW:** Arthur Lowe as Swindley on the cover of *TV Times*, 1 July 1965.

from being a drama, it was a studio-based sitcom with a live studio audience providing the laughter. Swindley's circumstances had changed, too. Although viewers had seen him being promoted to area manager of Gamma Garments only months before, here they were reintroduced to the character as he launched himself headfirst into his new job as assistant manager at Dobson and Hawks department store. Under the frustrated eye of his boss, Mr Parbold, and with the occasional assistance from sympathetic ladies from the shop floor and canteen – including a pre-*Corrie* Betty Driver – Swindley battled with upper management, shoplifters and lost children.

You have probably noticed that none of this backstory has even the slightest hint of the supernatural. *Coronation Street* and even *Pardon the Expression*, with its proto-*Are You Being Served?* antics, were grounded squarely in the everyday happenings of British working class life. Swindley crossed from kitchen sink to shop floor without so much as a bump in the night.

However, after the first series of *Pardon the Expression*, 12 episodes in all, proved popular, a second run – with a whopping 24 instalments – would begin to take things in a new direction. Perhaps indicating a little restlessness on the part of the writers, the series increasingly leaned away from the shop floor and let its characters out into the wider world.

After trips to hotels, jail cells and cabarets, the story that really teed up Leonard Swindley's future was "The Ghost of Batsworth Castle", written by Charles Hart and Peter Bishop and broadcast on 2 May 1966. Spending only a single scene in the department store, the episode sees the staff take off for an outing to the titular country estate. It isn't long before Swindley and his new manager, Wally Hunt, are separated from the main tour group and mistaken for a pair of expected, but unwelcome, weekend guests of the Duke. In a bid to make sure his guests don't outstay their welcome, his

"ON CERTAIN NIGHTS, HE RISES FROM THE MURKY DEPTHS, GROANING HORRIBLY"

Dukeship chooses to put them up in the estate's east wing – which a tour guide has previously informed us is haunted by the ghost of its former occupant – a certain Sir Percy, who was stretched on a rack and thrown into the moat. "On certain nights, he rises from the murky depths, groaning horribly," quotes Swindley with relish.

In order to ensure that his guests are sufficiently frightened out of their wits, the Duke's nephew is called over to put on a good show and before long some standard haunted house shenanigans ensue – creaking floorboards, howling winds, blackouts, ghostly apparitions and a painting where the eyes seem to follow you about the room all put in an appearance. But what really makes the episode stand out is the genuinely unexpected final twist – a phone call reveals that the prankster nephew couldn't make it after all – and the full bodied apparition of Sir Percy is revealed to be a genuine spirit! As if to prove that this episode was no on-off, it was swiftly followed by a two-parter entitled "Thunderfinger", written by Harry Driver and Vince Powell. With the series' usual bouncy theme tune and simple title graphics abandoned in favour of the James Bond fanfare and a gyrating go-go girl, Swindley saw himself drawn into the world of espionage. Assigned to the trail of the mysterious, white rabbit stroking Mr Neptune by Sir Charles Dobson (John Le Mesurier), our intrepid man of action faces off against intimidating heavies, femme fatales and double crossers. It's a delightfully odd affair only slightly undermined by the sort of 'it was all a dream' ending that "The Ghost of Bosworth Castle" so deftly avoided. *Pardon the Expression* came to an end on 27 June 1966, with another episode that didn't concern itself with the shop floor – "On Health Farm Sommet Stirs" – but less than three months later, Leonard Swindley's televisual reprieve was revealed by an article in *The Stage and Television Today*, which reported that Arthur Lowe was rehearsing a new hour-long comedy series for Granada.[2]

LEONARD SWINDLEY: GHOST HUNTER

This new series was entitled *Turn Out The Lights*, and just as *Pardon the Expression* quickly distanced itself from the format of *Coronation Street*, the programme marked itself out as distinct from its forbear both by eschewing the audience laughter of its predecessor and by immediately throwing Swindley and Hunt into a brand new situation.

Heralded by the cover of that week's *TV Times*, *Turn Out The Lights* made its debut at 9.10pm on Friday 6 January 1967. After years of bungling, Swindley and Hunt find themselves sacked from Dobson and Hawks, leading Swindley to investigate what he feels to be a malign influence over his for-

It's Swindley -hunting SPOOKS

by GRAEME KAY

MEET Leonard "Sherlock" Swindley (actor Arthur Lowe)—amateur ghost hunter—as you'll see him in *Turn Out the Lights*, which starts on Friday.

You may remember that this irrepressible little man was unceremoniously sacked from Dobson and Hawks with store manager Walter Hunt (Robert Dorning) back in July.

"As Swindley and Hunt go sleuthing in the world of spooks and spirits," says Arthur Lowe, "they develop a Sherlock Holmes and Dr. Watson relationship. Well, almost."

He says: "It starts when Hunt has his horoscope read by a phoney astrologer. Swindley, who doesn't believe in it, goes to the rescue.

"And in the process, he meets a member of the Institute of Psychic Research. By this time, he is completely engrossed in the business and shows such promise, he is invited to tour the country, with Hunt, lecturing to women's institutes."

The show is nothing like *Pardon the Expression*. "We have played down the broad comedy. These are practically one-hour shows, and it's almost impossible to sustain comedy for that length of time."

Neither Arthur nor his wife Joan believes in ghosts, but Mrs. Lowe has experienced a curious series of dreams.

Fourteen years ago, she dreamed about an old house, built over some stables. The dream recurred, and each time the house got shabbier and shabbier until it was almost a ruin.

Eight years later, while house-hunting in London, Arthur and his son, Stephen, looked through a house in Knightsbridge that was in a dreadful state.

Arthur said: "Joan insisted on seeing it. It was her 'dream' house, right down to the old stables. We moved in, and the dreams stopped. We've never regretted it, we still live there."

ABOVE: *TV Times* ran an article about *Turn Out the Lights* in January 1967. **BELOW:** *Daily Mirror* columnist Kenneth Estaugh found himself warming to the new series – not a feeling shared by most TV critics.

mer boss – the horoscope-touting celebrity astrologer Mr Merlin. In further episodes, he went on to investigate sinister psychics, peeping poltergeists and suspect séances

Unfortunately, not a single second of *Turn Out The Lights* was preserved for posterity in the ITV archives. Unlike both *Coronation Street* and *Pardon the Expression*, which exist in full and could therefore be repeated or released on home media, Swindley's swansong quickly faded from the public consciousness. No episode scripts are held by ITV and a recent enquiry to the University of Manchester, which now hold the Granada paperwork archives, has yielded only a short promotional synopsis of the show, itself presently buried amongst a vast collection of boxes waiting to be properly catalogued.

TV LAST NIGHT

by Kenneth Eastaugh

My reflex reaction to Turn Out The Lights (ITV) has been to turn off the telly.

As a piece of comedy writing, directing and acting, this new series about a couple of ghost hunters has dropped clangers with the regularity of a ball and chain bumping down concrete steps.

But, surprise, surprise —last night with slightly better material, lead actor Arthur Lowe as Leonard Swindley, achieved several scenes of noteworthy skill. I live in hope.

To assemble any sort of overview of this series, then, is to undertake an act of ephemeral archæology. The recollections of contemporary viewers, old television listings, press reviews and news coverage are all useful in attempting to envision what the series might have been like.

"Mr Swindley Back As A Ghost Hunter," proclaimed one article in the *Sunday Mirror*. "His career must be unique in TV history," the piece continued. "In his new series, Swindley takes up amateur ghost-hunting. Mr Hunt, still with him, falls into the hands of a phoney astrologer. Swindley enlists the help of a psychic institute. The members are so pleased

CREEPS ON THE COBBLES

While *Turn Out The Lights* was miles removed from the serial that first introduced Leonard Swindley to the world, over the years *Coronation Street* has been no stranger to the paranormal. Here are some of the never debunked haunted highlights from six decades in the Rovers Return.

GHOSTLY GLASSES (1975)

In 1964, gossipy Martha Longhurst (Lynne Carol) was the first *Coronation Street* regular to receive an on-screen death. Ena and Minnie's best friend passed away suddenly in the snug of the Rovers Return and eventually everybody moved on with their lives. Then, in 1975, barmaid Betty Turpin (Betty Driver) – who had never met Martha – found a pair of oddly familiar spectacles on the bar. They were eventually claimed by another customer, but this didn't explain the ghostly echoes of Martha's voice that viewers heard in previous episodes.

LYNNE ON THE LANDING (1996)

The poisonous Ivy Brennan (Lynne Perry) died of an off-screen stroke in 1995, but one year later her ghostly visage was glimpsed both at the top of her stairs by friend Vera Duckworth and peering out of the bedroom window by granddaughter Sarah. Ivy's widower Don called in a fake exorcist to put people's minds at ease and the spirit was never seen again.

AS I LEAVE YOU THERE (2010)

Returning home from his birthday party, a tired Jack Duckworth (Bill Tarmy) settled down in an armchair to listen to some of his favourite Matt Monroe tunes. An exhausted "I'm tired Vera," escaped his lips and viewers were shocked and delighted to hear his late wife reply. Returning after an absence of two years, Vera (Liz Dawn) was thrilled when her curmudgeonly soulmate embraced her for one final dance as "As I Leave You There" sounded out over the terraced roofs of the street. When his family returned home later in the evening, they found Jack had passed away peacefully.

TURN OUT THE LIGHTS EPISODE GUIDE

As was all too common during the early decades of British television, no copies of *Turn Out The Lights* were retained in the ITV archives. What is more, no scripts are currently known to survive. It truly is a lost series. Here, we excavate the episodes' plots from TV listings and press clippings.

1 THE BOYHOOD HAUNT

Transmitted: Fri 6 Jan 1967
Written by Peter Eckersley and Kenneth Cope

Following their sacking from Dobson and Hawks, Leonard Swindley is shocked when his colleague, Walter Hunt, confesses that he is totally under the influence of his horoscope – Aries the Ram. In spite of Swindley's scoffing, Hunt insists on introducing him to Mr Merlin (Peter Wyngarde), the famous astrologer – a meeting that leads ` to the most mysterious results. Also guest starring a young Ben Kingsley as Andrew Bazir.

2 HAIL TO THEE, AUNT SHELMADINE

Transmitted: Friday 13 Jan 1967
Written by Anthony Skene

Swindley, suffering from a terrible cold, goes along to investigate the psychic powers of Mr Willow (Paul Whitsun-Jones *pictured centre*), the medium. Swindley remains sceptical during Willow's trance, but when he returns home from the séance, it becomes more and more apparent that Willow has conjured up a very unexpected visitor indeed.

3 A BIG HAND FOR A LITTLE LADY

Transmitted: Friday 20 Jan 1967
Written by Peter Eckersely & Kenneth Cope

When a noisy poltergeist strikes among the scantily-clad showgirls of a Midland club the sequins fall and the feathers fairly fly. This veritable who's who of 1970s sitcoms features Yootha Joyce (*Man About the House*, *George and Mildred*), Michael Robbins (*On The Buses*), and Trevor Bannister and Wendy Richard (*Are You Being Served?*) in guest roles.

4 THE HAPPY MEDIUM

Transmitted: Friday 27 Jan 1967
Written by Stanley Hearn

The elderly residents of a small seaside hotel become very interested when the colourful Stella Lonsdale starts holding regular séances. But a series of strange events soon prompts proprietress Miss Pannel to call in her old friends Messrs Swindley and Hunt to investigate something darker than a clouded crystal ball.

5 YOU CAN'T GET THE WOOD

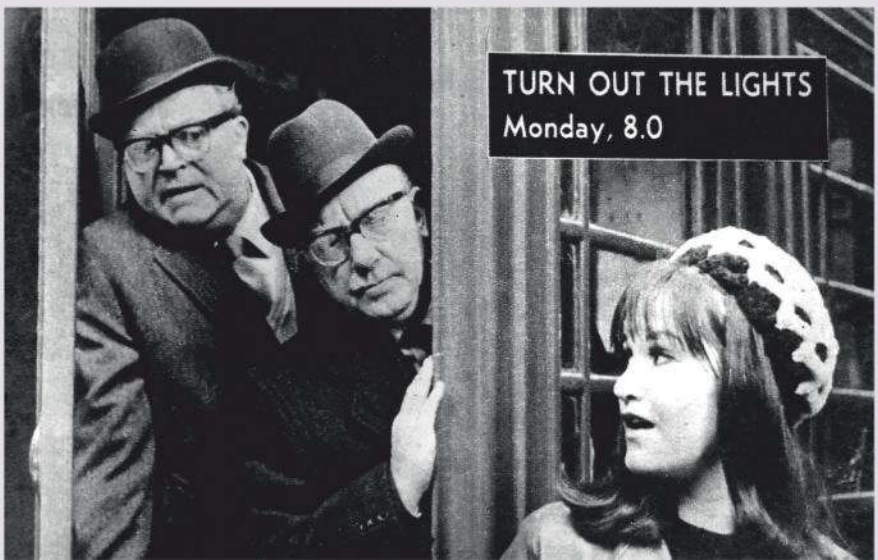
Transmitted: Friday 3 Feb 1967
Written by Peter Eckersley

A statue starts to weep in a provincial graveyard – a municipal miracle? Swindley and Hunt aren't so sure. Why is the medical officer so interested in the grave of a long-dead alderman? Why is the statue crying? Is it because the cemetery is to be turned into a new shopping centre? Or is there some other reason?

6 ONE FOR YES, TWO FOR NO

Transmitted: Friday 10 Feb 1967
Written by John Finch

After giving a talk to the Black Wrath Ladies' Institute, Swindley and Hunt stay overnight in a desolate farm on the Yorkshire moors owned by two elderly spinsters. As they settle down to enjoy the farm's home-cooked fare, the pair soon find all is not well in the house. A strange man enters, picks up a shotgun, and leaves without a word. To make matters worse, Swindley is invited to take part in a table-tilting session – and the table tells him that a guest in the house will die...



that they sign him on. He travels around the country giving lectures to Townswomen's Guilds and Women's Institutes with Mr Hunt as his assistant." [3]

"Hunt's unquestioning belief in the truth of his horoscope," wrote John Saunders of *The Stage and Television Today*, "gave Swindley plenty of opportunity for digs at the whole star-reading industry." The series, it seems, favoured the sceptics' point of view. [4]

In preparing this article, I attempted to track down anybody who remembered watching the series over five decades ago. The memories of the few who could recall the show were suitably hazy, ranging from childhood recollections of a crying statue to vague remembrances that the series used Camille Saint-Saëns' *Danse macabre* as its theme tune. Where contemporary memories fail, however, we can turn to comments made in the press at the time.

The aforementioned John Saunders was quickly won over. "I was afraid," he wrote, "that *Turn Out The Lights* was going to be an hour-long extension of *Pardon the Expression*, and I approached the whole thing with fear and trembling. And that just goes to show how wrong pre-judgement can be: *Turn Out The Lights* is as good as *Pardon the Expression* was bad." [5]

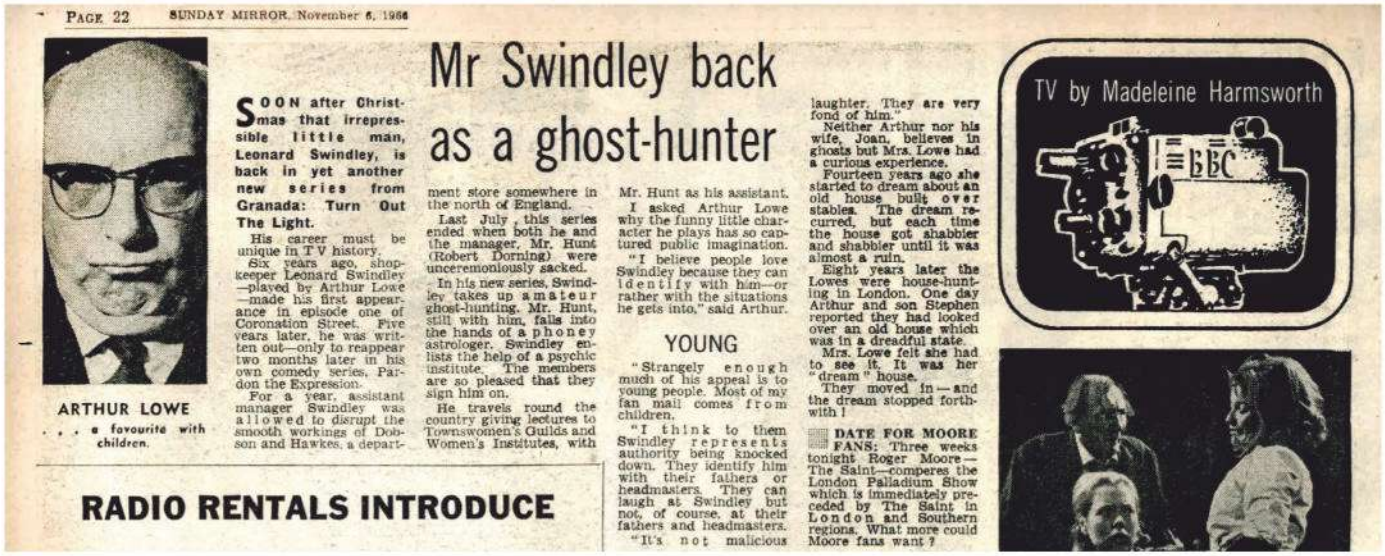
Saunders, however, was a fairly lonely voice in a sea of criticism. "Oh dear, oh dear, oh dear," proclaimed Chris Reynolds of the *Reading Evening Post*. Although he appreciated the series' main title sequence, that was as far as his praise went. "A brand new year with brand new rubbish. The sort of rubbish that casts one to the depths of depression; so incredibly bad that it hardly seems credible… Poor old Swindley! He should have stayed in *Coronation Street*, where at least the scripts were controlled." [6]

Upon viewing the series' premiere, Kenneth Eastaugh of the *Daily Mirror* bemoaned its "dull caricatures" in what he summed up as "an often clumsy, invariably unsatisfactory experience," but resolved to stay tuned due to what he saw as an intriguing "ghost-hunting" premise. He was somewhat rewarded for his loyalty, writing a few weeks later that "last night with slightly better material, lead actor Arthur Lowe as Leonard Swindley, achieved several scenes of noteworthy skill. I live in hope." [7]

Despite the temporary reprieve, a viewer wrote to the same paper to say: "I thought tripe was a tasty Northern country dish until I saw *Turn Out The Lights*. Now I know what real tripe is." [8]

Even Laurence Shelley, who had previously sung the praises of *Pardon the Expression* in the pages of the *Nantwich Chronicle*, felt that, "This ghost-hunting series has just about extracted whatever humour was left in psychic-research after Noel Coward had finished with it in *Blithe Spirit* and deserves a quick, painless end." [9]

His wish was granted. After only six episodes, compared with *Pardon the Expression*'s thirty-six, the odd experiment was quietly retired. There were to be no further



PAGE 22 SUNDAY MIRROR, November 6, 1966

Mr Swindley back as a ghost-hunter

ARTHUR LOWE . . . a favourite with children.

SOON after Christmas that irrepressible little man, Leonard Swindley, is back in yet another new series from Granada: Turn Out The Light.

His career must be unique in TV history.

Six years ago, shopkeeper Leonard Swindley—played by Arthur Lowe—made his first appearance in episode one of Coronation Street. Five years later, he was written out—only to reappear two months later in his own comedy series, Pardon the Expression.

For a year, assistant manager Swindley was allowed to disrupt the smooth workings of Dobson and Hawkes, a department store somewhere in the north of England.

Last July, this series ended when both he and the manager, Mr. Hunt (Robert Dorning) were unceremoniously sacked.

In his new series, Swindley takes up amateur ghost-hunting. Mr. Hunt, still with him, falls into the hands of a phoney astrologer. Swindley enlists the help of a psychic institute. The members are so pleased that they sign him on.

He travels round the country giving lectures to Townswomen's Guilds and Women's Institutes, with Mr. Hunt as his assistant.

I asked Arthur Lowe why the funny little character he plays has so captured public imagination.

"I believe people love Swindley because they can identify with him—or rather with the situations he gets into," said Arthur.

YOUNG

"Strangely enough much of his appeal is to young people. Most of my fan mail comes from children.

"I think to them Swindley represents authority being knocked down. They identify him with their fathers or headmasters. They can laugh at Swindley but not, of course, at their fathers and headmasters.

"It's not malicious laughter. They are very fond of him."

Neither Arthur nor his wife, Joan, believes in ghosts but Mrs. Lowe had a curious experience.

Fourteen years ago she started to dream about an old house built over stables. The dream recurred, but each time the house got shabbier and shabbier until it was almost a ruin.

Eight years later the Lowes were house-hunting in London. One day Arthur and son Stephen reported they had looked over an old house which was in a dreadful state.

Mrs. Lowe felt she had to see it. It was her "dream" house.

They moved in—and the dream stopped forthwith!

DATE FOR MOORE FANS: Three weeks tonight Roger Moore—The Saint—compères the London Palladium Show which is immediately preceded by The Saint in London and Southern regions. What more could Moore fans want?

RADIO RENTALS INTRODUCE

TV by Madeleine Harmsworth

ITV / SHUTTERSTOCK

ABOVE: A piece in the *Sunday Mirror* of 6 Nov 1966 previews the new series. **LEFT:** A production still from the episode "A Big Hand for the Little Lady", starring Arthur Lowe and Yootha Joyce (right).

television outings for Leonard Swindley. In later interviews, Lowe painted a picture of his willingness to move on. "I'd done this character of Swindley for about six and a half years," he told Ed Doolan of BRMB Radio in 1976, "and we thought it was time to stop – both Granada and I thought it was time that we wrapped that one up. So I decided that I'd go back into the theatre for a year; till the heat was off television-wise, you see."

Lowe wouldn't have to wait long. Within the year, the BBC would promote him the rank of Captain in a new wartime sitcom and the actor would go from *Turn Out The Lights* to "Put That Light Out!" in the ever popular *Dad's Army*.

JOAN'S DREAM HOUSE

Before we return *Turn Out All The Lights* to the mausoleum, however, it seems only fitting that I leave you with a real-life tale of the paranormal.

Throughout Arthur Lowe's career, a pattern emerged that saw his wife Joan playing a prominent part whenever possible – she appeared in his series, they toured in stage productions together, and she dictated which roles he did and did not take. The promotion of *Turn Out The Lights* proved to be no exception. In multiple articles promoting the series, Joan takes centre stage to tell reporters of an incident that occurred some 14 years earlier. "It was then," she told a reporter for Tyne Tees' *The Viewer* magazine, "that I first started to dream about a particularly fine house. It was a grand, old house over some stables, very impressive.

"Over the years the same house appeared in my dreams, again and again. And a strange thing was that it seemed to get older and more neglected. It gradually lost its fine appearance, until eventually it was almost in ruins.

"Then, eight years ago, when we were house hunting, Arthur and our son, Stephen, told me they had seen a possible buy in Knightsbridge, London, but that it was in a dreadful state.

"Of course, when I saw it I knew right away that it was my *dream house* – literally. It was exactly as I had dreamt it. The stables, everything.

"It was about 150 years old and almost derelict, but we couldn't turn down the house of my dreams, could we?" [10]

The Lowes moved in and – so the story goes – Joan's dreams stopped forthwith. Is there any truth to this tale of psychic prescience? Well, Stephen Lowe doesn't mention it in his biography of his father, and it strikes me that if the family home had been acquired through an act of slumbering divination this would *probably* merit inclusion; but when presented with the opportunity to print the truth or the legend, I opt in this case to print the legend…

NOTES

1 *Sunday Mirror*, 6 Nov 1966,
2 *The Stage and Television Today*, 22 Sept 1966.
3 *Sunday Mirror*, 6 Nov 1966.
4 *The Stage and Television Today*, 5 Jan 1967.
5 Ibid.
6 Reading Evening Post, 03 Jan 1967.
7 *Daily Mirror*, 24 Jan 1967.
8 *Daily Mirror*, 21 Jan 1967.
9 *The Nantwich Chronicle*, 19 Jan 1967.
10 *The Viewer*, Jan 7-13, 1967.

ANDREW T SMITH is a writer and filmmaker from the northeast of England. He has written books on the Marx Brothers and *Last of the Summer Wine*, presented work at the annual Rod Serling conference at Ithaca College, New York, and is the co-creator of the Supermarionation series *Nebula-75*. In his spare time, he dislikes writing about himself.

The Strange Case of Tattarisuo

EMILIA UKKONEN digs up a forgotten story from Finland's troubled 20th century history and recounts a grim tale of severed limbs, black magic, mystical visions and a circle of grave-robbing witches...

The most gruesome case in Finland's history began on Tuesday 19 August 1930, when 14-year-old Leo Löfman found a human hand in a spring. The boy had been picking berries in Tattarisuo, a marshy, unpopulated area on the outskirts of Helsinki. He had thrown a stick into the water for his dog to fetch; the dog instead found a severed hand beneath a stone.

Officers at the nearby Malmi police station initially doubted the shaken teenager's sensational claim. Eventually, three policemen agreed to go with Löfman to investigate. When they reached the scene, they saw that his story was true: in a wide pool, a hand was floating on the surface of the clear water. The officers determined that it was a right hand that had once belonged to a well-groomed woman. Manicured nails indicated its former owner had not been a manual labourer. The water's cold temperature had preserved it well.

However, no-one had reported losing a hand, so the matter was forgotten – only to resurface the following year.

AARNE PIETINEN / FINNISH HERITAGE AGENCY

LEFT: The hand of a well-groomed woman was the first grisly discovery made at the Tattarisuo spring. **FACING PAGE:** Men seaching the area after further grim discoveries in September 1931.

The Morgue

September 1931 was hot. A truck driver stopped at the spring to quench his thirst. Bending down to drink, he spotted a white object at the bottom of the water. Using a stick, he retrieved what turned out to be a human thumb. Not to be outdone, his workmate went to see for himself, and found a woman's head at the base of a spruce tree. Duly informed, Malmi's police searched the area once more, locating six feet, three more hands and a bundle of fingers tied together with string. In total, their haul consisted of one head, nine hands, nine feet, 12 fingers, and a patch of hair. These were taken to the University of Helsinki's Department of Anatomy for further examination.

In the days following the grisly discovery, rumours abounded. Newspapers speculated about a massacre, with at least eight people murdered. Sexually motivated 'lust-murder' emerged as an early explanation. Two months earlier, serial killer Peter Kürten, the 'Vampire of Dusseldorf', had been executed in Germany. This *lustmörd* case was still fresh in people's minds. Admittedly, some questioned why a *lustmörd* killer would be interested in severed limbs. Also, the body parts were clean and neatly severed, indicating the perpetrator's calmness, whereas lust-murderers tend to act in a frenzied, agitated state of mind.

> HIS WORKMATE FOUND A WOMAN'S HEAD AT THE BASE OF A SPRUCE TREE

The Tattarisuo site is located at Helsinki's northeast outskirts, beside a main road linking the capital to the town of Porvoo. The spring is one-and-a-half miles from Malmi Cemetery. A shortcut often used by locals leads off the main road through a heavily wooded area; this path runs past two clear water springs where the discoveries were made. The area had a reputation for shady business, with its thick undergrowth and distance from any houses. Illegal liquor stills and moonshine caches were often found here; prohibition laws in Finland were in place until 1932. Following news of the gruesome finds, people began visiting the area in large numbers, arriving on bicycles, motorbikes, milk floats, in cars, and on foot. During autumn 1931, the remote spring became Finland's most popular tourist attraction.

The Helsinki University's Anatomy Department established that the body parts had belonged to around 20 different people who had died one month earlier. They had been severed with a fairly dull knife, without any special skill, and kept in the water for a relatively short time. It appeared they had been chosen at random.

Accusing fingers pointed towards Harju Cemetery's morgue, above whose main entrance is inscribed the cheery Latin tag *Statutum est hominibus mori* ("It is appointed for men to die"). The gloomy red brick building now serves as a youth centre, but was once where bodies were washed, dressed, boxed, and put on the corpse train bound for the chapel.

The morgue's janitor, Johan Emil Saarenheimo, was arrested on 3 October 1931. Saarenheimo was 53 years old, a former carpenter and a member of the *Ruusu-Risti*

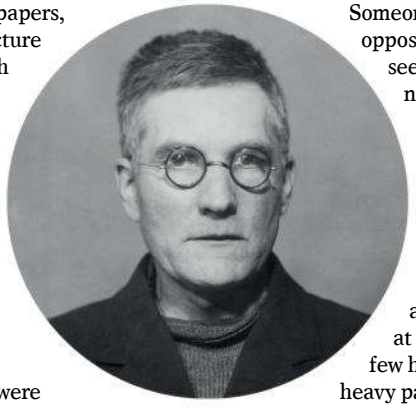
HUGO SUNDSTRÖM / FINNISH HERITAGE AGENCY/STOCK

THE NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF FINLAND

ABOVE: The gloomy red brick Harju morgue, where bodies were washed, placed in coffins and put on the train to Malmi cemetery. **BELOW:** The morgue's rather strange janitor, Johan Emil Saarenheimo, soon fell under suspicion and was arrested by the police on four occasions.

(Rose-Cross), a Theosophically oriented society. Police searches of his apartment turned up photographs of dead bodies, and several books and pamphlets with themes of witchcraft or the occult. Among these was a copy of the infamous 'Black Bible', a book of magic spells. These books were rare enough to be regarded with some awe.

Suspicion was also aroused by a leaflet in Saarenheimo's possession describing a strange method of water therapy that required a dead body. The evidence appeared compelling; police believed they had found their man. Once the suspect's identity was revealed, local gossip about the janitor began to appear in newspapers, presented as fact. His picture was published, along with his home address. The press exhibited an inexhaustible interest in Saarenheimo's personality, hobbies and family life. He was portrayed as a sinister and abnormal man, and lurid and imaginative stories about his supposedly perverted mind and nocturnal activities were published.



THE NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF FINLANDPHOTO

"What did Saarenheimo's mother's coffin contain?" asked a headline in the *Helsingin Sanomat* newspaper on 8 October. According to a family friend, the janitor's mother had been buried the previous winter, the pallbearers questioning why the coffin had felt so heavy, despite the deceased woman having been small and slight. Had Saarenheimo been placing other people's body parts in his mother's coffin to dispose of them?

THE CARETAKER WAS PORTRAYED AS A SINISTER AND ABNORMAL MAN

Someone living in a house opposite the morgue recalled seeing its lights on late at night. Other witnesses claimed the morgue had been repeatedly visited by men who, judging by their appearance, belonged to a "better class of person". Apparently, these gentlemen always arrived by car at midnight, leaving a few hours later, carrying heavy packages away with them, assisted by the helpful janitor.

On the day of Saarenheimo's arrest, a Saturday, police opened up a row of graves in the cemetery, finding seven mutilated bodies. This was a paupers' burial section, with coffins stacked in large common graves and only covered when full. Thus, access to these corpses would have been fairly easy. The police investigation continued the following week, with three more dismembered bodies discovered on Monday, and a further 10 on Tuesday. This disinterment was an unpleasant business, and although the Prohibition Act was still in force, diggers were compensated with alcoholic refreshment.

The Rumours

While Saarenheimo protested his innocence, Malmi's police fielded numerous telephone calls from concerned citizens offering their own theories about the sinister discoveries. Officers also dealt with hundreds of letters, mostly anonymous, accusing various individuals or groups. Romani families and Freemasons' lodges were frequently mentioned.

The place-name 'Tattarisuo' may be interpreted in a number of ways. The Finnish word *tattari* may be understood as 'gypsies'; and *suo* means 'swamp'. Thus, Tattarisuo could be translated as 'the Gypsies' swamp', and as a result, Roma people were among the first accused.

A young Roma man visited the *Helsingin Sanomat* newspaper office to defend his people, explaining that they did not mutilate bodies for religious or any other purposes: *"The gypsy [is accused of] stealing haystacks and of double-dealing in the horse trade, but the most heinous crimes [of others] are not*

AARNE PIETINEN / FINNISH HERITAGE AGENCY

ABOVE: The Tattarisuo site was remote, covered with thick vegetation and far from any residential area. **BELOW:** A man trying to retrieve body parts from the spring during a search in 1931.

done," he said. *"Let the cat thank us and the dog bark at us, but things go too far when we are accused of mutilating bodies."*

One of the more peculiar stories doing the rounds suggested that dead bodies were being made into sausages, with the inedible portions discarded in Tattarisuo's springs. A popular doggerel rhyme of the period ran:

In town, the dreadful rumours fly
But as is usual, mostly lies.
Of sausage made from human meat
Ill fortune comes to him who eats.

Ajan Sana, a sensationalist right-wing magazine, jumped on the story when the uproar was at its height, with a headline that read: "The mystery is solved – Do the clues lead to the sausage maker?" They suggested that all paths led back to a certain shop, a small establishment on the first floor of a wooden house which sold homemade processed meats.

The article claimed that Saarenheimo repeatedly visited this sausage maker at the corner of Kirstinkatu and Josafatinkatu, 15 minutes by foot from the morgue, and darkly hinted that the janitor sold body parts as raw material for their products.

An investigation by the authorities did not find anything wrong with the shop's meat products. On the contrary, its sausages were found to be "made from excellent raw materials". The shop sued *Ajan Sana* magazine and won, and the magazine ended up paying compensation.

The Witch

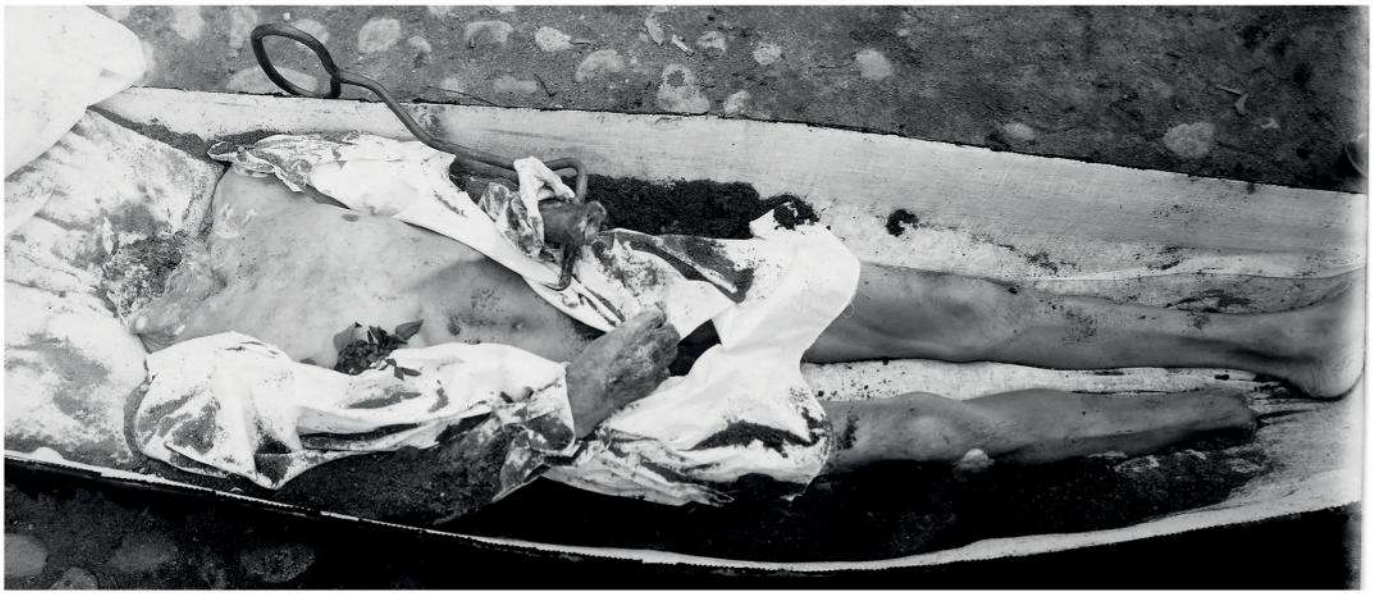
From the start, police investigators focused on practitioners of witchcraft, whether those who sought to cure diseases, conjure spirits, or predict the future. One Vilho Kallio became a suspect. Known as *Noita-Kallio* ('Witch-Kallio') for his gaunt, almost cadaverous appearance, hollow cheeks and close-set eyes, he had practised witchcraft for over 20 years and claimed he could heal the sick using spring water.

An anonymous letter to the police stated: "*It was yesterday morning that the landlord and some of the men who were there removed the belongings of a man named Kallio from the room that he had moved out of. When lifting one of the timber boxes, its cover fell off, and two human arm bones, two lower leg bones, two hip bones, one adult human skull, the upper part of a child's skull and a snake's head were found in the cupboard. What purpose did the man have for collecting and keeping such things?*"

Accordingly, Kallio was arrested on 27 November 1931, but with little or no evidence against him, he was released.

Vilho Kallio was born in 1873. He attended primary school for a couple of months, learn-

HUGO SUNDSTRÖM / FINNISH HERITAGE AGENCYSTOCK



THE NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF FINLANDPHOTO

ABOVE: A mutliated man's body, one of several discovered by police opening graves in the cemetery. **BELOW:** One of the severed heads found in the spring. **BOTTOM:** The police dug up the common graves of poor townspeople in Malmi cemetery as they searched for evidence.

ing to read and write. Supporting himself from the age of 10, he had first been a shepherd boy, and then a tailor's apprentice, after which he entered military service. Three years later he returned to tailoring, continuing until he began working as a carter and doing various odd jobs.

At the time of the Tattarisuo events, the fascist Lapua movement was on the rise, with thousands of armed activists threatening a coup and attempting to overthrow the government in the 1932 Mäntsälä rebellion. Besides this political turmoil, Kallio's various jobs reflect the economic instability of the period, during the worldwide Great Depression.

Kallio claimed to have seen visions from an early age. Once, as a young shepherd, a stranger approached him, but when Kallio tried speaking to the man, he suddenly disappeared. He had also witnessed a woman entering a sauna in broad daylight, but when he followed her in, the sauna was empty. Since his early thirties, he told police, he had experienced visions of people, some living, some dead. Around this time, Kallio was teaching a 19-year-old woman the art of tailoring. In return, she offered to help him contact the spirit world. She also promised to show him how to heal the sick. In 1913, Kallio tested his abilities on his first patient, a nine-month-old-boy with a skin disease; he healed the infant with prayers and by washing his body with fresh spring water.

THE NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF FINLANDPHOTO

AARNE PIETINEN / FINNISH HERITAGE AGENCY

The Spring

In 1921, one Hilma Sundberg contacted Kallio, hoping his mystical powers could help her regain her health as well as the 1,000 Finnmarks (£400 in today's terms) stolen from her handbag on a train journey. She had worked as a servant before marrying a railwayman, who soon left her after tiring of his wife's occult interests and mental health problems. In her own words, she had then "gone crazy", and a friend recommended Kallio to her.

By autumn 1929 Kallio was working as a stonemason at a Malmi quarry, near Tattarisuo. Seeing a vision of an old woman walking away from the spring, he believed she was guarding treasure hidden there by the infamous Matti Haapoja, a legendary Finnish outlaw.

Kallio took Hilma Sundberg to the spring, urging her to watch as Matti Happoja's lost treasure resurfaced. When this did not occur, Kallio decided an offering was needed. By spring 1930, a human hand had begun to appear in Sundberg's visions. Kallio too had been given spiritual glimpses of a hand on several occasions, without yet understanding its significance. Discussing the matter, Sundberg said they must acquire a hand and offer it to the Tattarisuo spring. One summer night they both set out for Malmi Cemetery, climbing into an open grave as Kallio brushed aside the gravel and sand that showed it to be a recent burial. Unscrewing the coffin lid, he then severed the newly buried corpse's hand at the wrist. Before doing so, he recited the Lord's Prayer and intoned: "Justice and truth searching for all who have been oppressed and afflicted over the world, to all nations and tongues with insurmountable power." He and Sundberg then departed, Kallio carrying the severed hand wrapped in paper and concealed in his armpit. At the Tattarisuo spring just before midnight, Kallio deposited the hand in one of the larger pools of water.

Another disciple, Ida Maria Viden, turned up on New Year's Day 1930 asking Kallio's advice about an inheritance. She was apparently regarded as quite eccentric by those who knew her. Like Kallio, she claimed to have been granted spiritual vision since childhood. Viden's predominant aim in life was to secure an inheritance which, she believed, was owed to her illegitimate son, Ilmari. According to her, she'd once had a love affair with a wealthy doctor, the now deceased Dr Walteri Parviainen. Their liaison had resulted in two children, a girl and a boy. The daughter had died in 1920, leaving her son Ilmari as sole heir.

THE NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF FINLANDPHOTO

ABOVE: Police mug-shots of the witch circle: (top row, left to right) Vilho Kallio, the healer also known as Witch-Kallio; Hilma Sundberg; Ville Saari, a clairvoyant from the age of two; (bottom row, left to right) the former school cleaner Hilda Friman; Ida Viden, who saw visions of hands and feet; Johann Ilmari Hedman, Ida's son.

Ida Viden insisted that Dr Parviainen's will made Ilmari the beneficiary of several million Finnmarks. Unfortunately, this will had disappeared from her mother's apartment. She took legal action, but her case was dismissed, and she was sentenced to one month's imprisonment for misrepresentation, commuted to a shorter bread-and-water sentence of six days. Undaunted, she argued that both the magistrate and her own lawyers had been bribed to ensure she lost the case, which had left her owing around 100,000 Finnmarks, her husband's entire worth. He had borne the costs, but later divorced her.

Kallio gave her a lead object with a cross-shaped image on one side (Ida assumed he had taken it from a grave or tomb). She was to keep it as a good luck token, and it would help her receive information if grasped in her right hand.

In spring 1931, much like Kallio's and Sundberg's visions, Ida began to 'see' hands and feet. Her spirits and ephemeral writing she saw on walls urged the group to visit graves and obtain more body parts. After Kallio told her about the treasure he had 'seen' at the spring, Viden wanted to see for herself. One afternoon in late May, the group of spiritual seekers (Witch-Kallio, Ida Viden, her son Ilmari, and a new accomplice, the cleaning lady Hilda Friman) set out for Tattarisuo. Before departing, a spiritual command insisted they must not talk to one another, and that Friman and Ilmari should not journey all the way to the spring. Kallio told them to wait on the road, while he and Viden continued.

IDA VIDEN'S SPIRITS URGED THE GROUP TO OBTAIN MORE BODY PARTS

After about an hour, Kallio noticed the earth had changed colour and was now white. Similarly, leaves on the surrounding trees had become golden. He placed some paper on the ground, and Viden 'saw' a large number of people at the spring – the victims of the murderous outlaw Matti Haapoja. She then 'saw' Haapoja arrested and his sister weeping beside him. Haapoja himself also 'appeared' at the spring and revealed where he had hidden the treasure. Haapoja then walked slowly away, hands in pockets, disappearing from view. Then, supposedly, a large plain coffin filled with money rose to the water's surface, the lid opening to reveal a silver coffee pot and a bottle filled with gold coins.

Meanwhile, having waited at the roadside in the rain for over three hours, Ilmari eventually exclaimed, "Let's go home." The equally rain-sodden Hilda Friman agreed. They had to walk home all the way because the buses were full.

Kallio had had the foresight to bring a towel with him, knowing the treasure had lain underwater for some years. But when he and Viden attempted to remove some of the valuable items from the coffin, the lid snapped shut and both coffin and money dropped back down to the bottom of the pool. Perhaps as

AARNE PIETINEN / FINNISH HERITAGE AGENCY

ABOVE LEFT: This dilapidated wooden building, called the 'Wolf Pit', was the home of Witch-Kallio on Helsinki's Hameentie Street. Kallio, Friman and Saari shared a room together from the summer of 1932. **ABOVE RIGHT:** Police investigators in their office. Leaning against the desk is the shovel used by the witch circle.

some consolation for this ill-luck, Ida was then given a beatific vision of a beautiful garden inhabited by black people, full of singing and music, which Kallio too said he could hear, although he could see nothing of it.

The Circle

Soon, the group acquired another accomplice. A narrow-faced, dark-complexioned man wearing an army officer's uniform had appeared in one of Viden's visions, with the words "It is the Devil, when he comes, capture him" appearing on the wall. One day, a visitor called, asking for Kallio, His name was Ville Saari. Viden immediately recognised him as the army officer she'd seen while 'in the spirit' and warned Kallio of the message she'd seen on the wall. But Saari moved in a month later. He had no steady job and couldn't afford the rent at his previous place. The witches' commune was growing.

It is impossible to keep track of exactly where the witch circle lived and when they lived there. They often stayed together, with various groupings sharing a single room. In those days it was common for poor people to be evicted for unpaid rent forcing them to move frequently from place to place.

Saari was an angry-looking man, with hard penetrating eyes and deeply etched frown lines around a mouth accustomed to cursing. He too was apparently clairvoyant, and was said to have had contact with spirits since the age of two. He joined the cemetery outings. He was initially opposed to the idea, but a command "from above" changed his mind.

During the summer of 1931, they visited Malmi Cemetery several times, carrying off feet, hands, and heads. A damaged bit of fence allowed them to enter at night, but no lamps or torches were required, since at this time of year in Finland, even in the south, it is never truly dark.

VILLE SAARI TRANSFERRED THE SUPERNATURAL POWER TO KALLIO

Viden's 'spirit writing' visions gave the group instructions as to which body parts were required from which graves. They always prayed beside a coffin before opening it, referring to the severed limbs as 'seals.' Some were immersed in the spring, while others were buried in the ground at the four compass points. The immediate purpose, at least for Viden, was to facilitate success in her legal case, but Kallio had greater hopes: to defeat all injustice in the world.

During their expeditions, the former army officer Saari acted as leader, with Kallio and Ilmari as witnesses and, if necessary, assistants. Before setting out, Saari was given orders of how many and what kind of 'seals' were required. Viden had received a spirit message that Saari was now in charge "*because he is the Lord of the World, and raised from a young age for this task.*"

Ville Saari had moved to Russia with his parents at the age of nine, where he had worked for 20 years before returning to Finland in 1919. He had fought for Russia during World War I, but the spirits told him to stop using his clairvoyant abilities, as they should not be used for warfare. The power was to be transferred to Kallio.

Kallio, Saari, and Ida Viden departed for Malmi one afternoon at Midsummer 1931. There, the transfer of powers took place in the cemetery, at a place they called the "shrine". With Kallio facing east, Saari on his right and Ida slightly behind them, Kallio first recited the Lord's Prayer, then uttered the following spell: "*Cross the unguided path of truth in the world, where many who suffer injustice are not allowed to stand before their ancestors, not to stand before their sisters, for on the path of truth there is a rush for the world to conquer millions of people. To the way of truth, which leads to happiness in eternal life, where there is no injustice.*" With these words, Ville Saari transferred his supernatural power to Kallio.

The group made their last journey to Malmi after their handiwork had been discovered. During the final visit they took three body parts – two feet and one hand – and buried them. Saari was very angry that their secret doings at Tattarisuo had been exposed; by then they had only taken about 50 'seals', and he believed 70 were required for their work. They discussed continuing despite the discovery, but the spirits warned that guard dogs now protected the cemetery, and so the grave-robbing had to cease. Instead, they began catching pigeons and burying them in Mäntymäki, a rocky and wooded hill in a Helsinki park. Ida Viden claimed she'd 'seen' the pigeons the previous winter and had been commanded to take them to Mäntymäki, which the group called 'Zion', in order to establish a new Millennial world.

They lured the unfortunate birds onto a windowsill with breadcrumbs, after which they were either killed immediately or kept alive in a basket. The pigeons' blood was needed for magical inscriptions. They killed them with a knife, slitting their throats, the blood collected in a coffee cup. Kallio and Saari would take the pigeons to a pit, usually two or three at a time. Placed in this pit with their eyes facing east and covered with a sheet of parchment upon which Kallio had written: *"Prescribed by Jehovah"* and "*Not as Eve, but as an ancestor to the people in the way*

of truth". Another parchment bore the words: *"Do not deceive, he alone will bring you for a thousand years on the path of truth."*

Just before the Lapua fascists' unsuccessful Mäntsälä rebellion of 1932, Kallio had seen a White Guard's hat on the road, which he'd kicked aside (some White Guards had fought alongside the Lapua militia during their ill-fated coup attempt).

Another of Ida Viden's numerous visions ordered that the hat be brought back to the 'witch-house', so Kallio was sent to collect it. The well-preserved hat had only been at their place for a couple of days when another of Viden's visions directed it be buried at 'Zion' (Mäntymäki) to prevent the Lapua rebels from entering the capital. Kallio was again given the task, burying the cap with the prescribed incantations that they hoped would protect Helsinki.

To assist Viden and her long-drawn-out inheritance dispute, each member of the group decided to dispose of their property and belongings. Some were sold or pawned, and the rest were burned. Kallio, to whom Viden had promised 700,000 Finnmarks, destroyed all his remaining possessions. Their hope was that Viden's son Ilmari, after gaining his inheritance, would set up a business for everyone's benefit.

The End

Although the Tattarisuo mystery was by far the biggest news item in the Finnish press during autumn 1931, the lack of arrests and charges caused readers and reporters to drift off to other subjects. However, the police quietly continued their investigations. One July evening, officers waited in front of Kallio's residence. When Witch-Kallio returned home that evening, he was searched. Police found a cross, clearly taken from a coffin, in one of his pockets. Kallio was re-arrested. The mystery's threads began to be unpicked.

The casket-cross discovery turned out to be the key to solving the crimes. Vilho Kallio was arrested on 26 July 1932 as the main suspect. Soon afterwards, police arrested the entire witch-circle, detaining them for over one month. Although interrogated round the clock, no one agreed to speak unless Saari, the Lord of the World, gave his permission. The police eventually took everyone into one large room and asked Saari if he would allow the others to talk. After he answered in the affirmative, they started to reveal the truth behind the baffling and sinister events that had taken place in Tattarisuo over the past two years.

The case was heard at Helsinki Parish Court on 28 September 1932. A large crowd gathered outside, but no one other than journalists were admitted to the courtroom. On the Prosecutor General's desk were a number of objects seized from the accused, including a knife allegedly used to sever body parts, a shovel with which the graves had allegedly been opened, a pair of crosses taken from coffins and a number of photographs of the corpses apparently mutilated by the accused.

EMILIA UKKONEN

ABOVE: Graffiti at the Tattarisuo spring today reminds visitors of its dark history.

The court sentenced Vilho Kallio to a total of two years and four months imprisonment for mutilating 13 bodies. Ville Saari received three years for the mutilation of 18 bodies. For inciting these mutilations, Ida Viden was given two years. Her son Ilmari was let off lightly and given probation for assisting in the mutilation of eight bodies. Sundberg was charged with mutilating one body, but the district court dismissed the charge as the offense had taken place some years before. Hilda Friman was acquitted of all charges. Although the convicted cultists lodged an appeal with the Supreme Court, it was rejected. The Tattarisuo mystery was solved; there were corpses, but no murderers.

The Finland of the early 1930s had been independent for less than 15 years. Helsinki was not like London or Paris, and many of its houses were dilapidated wooden buildings. Most of its occupants were people who'd moved to the capital from rural areas in search of work. The new nation was looking to the future and Helsinki was to become its modern capital. The Tattarisuo news coverage carried with it a sense of shame; how was it possible that in the 1930s such superstition still existed, of all places in the new capital city?

It's not known what happened to the group's members after they were released from prison. For Saarenheimo, however, the Tattarisuo case was a personal disaster. The newspapers wrote unusually lurid and inaccurate stories about him, and had to some extent instigated a manhunt against the innocent caretaker. A week after his initial arrest, Saarenheimo's wife was taken to a mental hospital where she remained for the rest of her life. One of their children committed suicide, while another suffered from mental health problems into adulthood. Saarenheimo's mother's grave was opened up and her coffin searched. Saarenheimo lost his job. He was not re-employed by the Harju morgue, was forced to change his surname and had to leave Helsinki.

The members of Kallio's witch-circle represented the disenfranchised and impoverished working class. Although not politically active left-wingers or Communists, they sought to prevent the Lapua militia from seizing power, by means of pigeon sacrifice. The horrors of the recent Civil War were still fresh in people's memories, and they were worried about the machinations of the fascists. When they could do nothing to address these problems in the physical, material realm, *Noita-Kallio's* witch-circle sought to address them via the power of the spirit world.

At least one severed human head taken from the Malmi graves was never found. The area is still rather hard-bitten. It is adjacent to the motorway, and drivers pass it by daily without being aware of its dark history. Nearby is the recently closed Malmi Airport, an outlaw bikers' bar, and heaps of rubbish. Astride the location of the Tattarisuo spring there is a drainage conduit, which ceased its intake in the early 1980s. Its walls are decorated with graffiti, and crudely spray-painted skulls aptly recall Tattarisuo's past.

Almost 90 years have passed since the case was closed. All the people who were involved are themselves long under the soil, and the affair is mostly forgotten.

EMILIA UKKONEN is an artist from Finland who has a fascination for everything paranormal and occult. She investigated the Tattarisuo case using State police files, Helsinki court archives, minutes of civil arbitration tribunals from the National Archives of Finland, and the University of Helsinki's microfilm archive for newspapers of the period.

DROPPED

THE RENDLESHAM

With the release of a new documentary film about the Rendlesham Forest UFO incident imminent, DAVID CLARKE attempts to untangle the latest strands in the story as a new military whistle-blower comes forward with his version of events...

"What the hell is it?... Who is in charge?"

These were the questions that Airman 1st class Kurt Loutzenheiser asked US Air Force Security Police when he was confronted with a landed object deep inside Rendlesham Forest, Suffolk, England. It was a pitch black night and the NATO complex, that included USAF-controlled RAF Bentwaters and RAF Woodbridge, separated by the forest, was closed for the Christmas holidays.

The 21-year-old from Arizona was part of a skeleton crew of USAF personnel guarding RAF Bentwaters where nuclear weapons were secretly stored in bunkers at the height of the Cold War. Loutzenheiser, who left the USAF as Master Sergeant, was based at Bentwaters from 1980-81 and Woodbridge from 1981-83. During his time there he worked alongside personnel from the USAF's 67th Aerospace Rescue and Recovery Squadron. They had a 'boilerplate' of an Apollo Command Module on display, of which I will say more later.

During Christmas 1980 the 67th were not involved in any exercises. But he says he was called out on two or more occasions during a two-day period to drive a transport to the scene of an unspecified 'incident' deep in the woods. He believes this is the source of what later became known as the Rendlesham Forest UFO incident, often described as Britain's answer to Roswell.

But whereas other USAF personnel have talked about time-travellers, non-human intelligences and alien visitors who were interested in the contents of the bunkers at Bentwaters, Loutzenheiser's story is refreshingly matter-of-fact. He says quite candidly: "I don't know what I saw."

"A DROPPED OBJECT"

Gary Heseltine, a retired British Transport police officer, collected 17 different timed events that he says took place over a week-long period that began on Boxing Day, 26 December 1980.

"Those events included at least two craft landing, UFOs of several shapes and sizes being observed, entities being seen on at least three occasions, a laser type beam being directed along the entire length of the RAF Bentwaters storage area," he told me.

In stark contrast, Loutzenheiser says he was told the object he saw on the forest floor was "*a dropped object*" and, four decades later, he feels sure it was either an aircraft

DAVID CLARKE

OBJECT ACCIDENT?

PHOTO: MIKE P SHEPHERD / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

LINDA GODFREY

or part of an aircraft. On the first occasion, in the early hours of a dark December morning, he was ordered to drive a military truck that followed a convoy of Special Police units out of RAF Bentwaters.

It was dark and the convoy drove into the pine forest, passing the turn-off to the East Gate at RAF Woodbridge, into an area that he knew was British territory.

"We drove through trees to a small clearing," he told me. "It was the first time I had been outside the base [RAF Bentwaters] into the forest."

There he saw an object on the ground. He would not describe it in detail but says it was the size of tank.

"I got within 50 yards of it and there were some lights – white and blue lights. But I don't think they had anything to do with the object," he said.

His team installed portable light-alls and heaters in the clearing around the 'object'. This was cordoned off and at one point a flat-bed truck visited the scene.

He returned early the next morning, in daylight. There he saw, in addition to base security police, at least two British police officers who were walking around the object in the clearing. He was told they were from the Ministry of Defence and had their own transport.

Afterwards he was ordered not to discuss the incident and signed a non-disclosure agreement.

"I was told that I did not see it and I should keep my mouth shut.

"I took a decision not to talk about it and chose many years ago to avoid mentioning it to anyone for obvious reasons," he told me.

When searching online for old friends from the base he came across my account

"I GOT WITHIN 50 YARDS OF IT AND THERE WERE SOME LIGHTS – WHITE AND BLUE LIGHTS"

S OF THE WORLD

Sunday

STILL ONLY 25p BEST VALUE FOR MONEY

• Colonel's top secret report tells the facts

• Mystery craft in exploding wall of colour

• Animals flee from strange glowing object

UFO LANDS IN SUFFOLK

And that's OFFICIAL

NEWS OF THE WORLD INVESTIGATES

By KEITH BEABEY

EVIDENCE

NO HOAX SAYS THE

of the Rendlesham legend on my website, drdavidclarke.co.uk. After reading other accounts he says he found this "the most objective and least critical of the 'key players' involved."

"I find the willingness of the public to accept the most ridiculous and constantly evolving stories amusing," he said.

After serving at the Twin Base complex for three years, Loutzenheiser moved to RAF Mildenhall where he stayed until 1989 when the Cold War ended.

"It was not a cover-up, just mis-direction," he said, referring to the Rendlesham incident. "Everything that has come out since then has been just to send people off in the wrong direction. Whatever it was that happened, the base leadership would have been told about it immediately, as would the British MoD, as they were on site between six and eight hours after the incident began."

ABOVE: The base at RAF Woodbridge photographed in 2017. **FACING PAGE:** The site of the former East Gate entrance to RAF Woodbridge. **LEFT:** The famous *News of the World* headline from October 1983 that first broke the Rendlesham Forest UFO story.

So what does he believe happened?

"I don't know what it was," Loutzenheiser said. "But I did not see a UFO. This was something of conventional origin.

"The most likely explanation is that something fell off a plane and they wanted to find it before someone else did."

He speculates that 'Britain's Roswell' originated in a military blunder, perhaps involving an accident or aircraft malfunction. Its location in the forest, outside the base perimeter, posed a headache for both countries.

Loutzenheiser says he was told by Security Police that it was not 'a broken arrow' and there was no radiation hazard. In USAF parlance 'broken arrow' refers to an accident that involves nuclear weapons, warheads or components that does not create a risk of nuclear war. Earlier that year a Damascus Titan ICBM exploded after liquid fuel leaked from its silo in Arkansas. On that occasion, news of the accident leaked out immediately and President Jimmy Carter went on TV news to reassure the public there had been no leak of radioactive materials and the situation was under control.

RICHARD FREEMAN

USAF / SMITHSONIAN

USAF / NATIONAL ARCHIVES

ABOVE LEFT: The 'boilerplate' Apollo module being moved from Pease AFB, Florida, to the Smithsonian, where it now resides. Until 1983 it was on display outside RAF Woodbridge **ABOVE RIGHT:** An HH-53 Super Jolly Green Giant helicopter being flown by the 67th Aerospace Rescue and Recovery Squadron over RAF Woodbridge.

RED HERRINGS AND MUDDY WATERS

So, what should we make of Loutzenheiser's story?

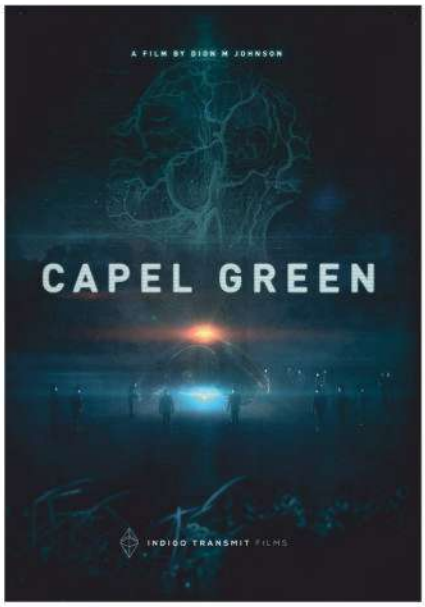
Is it yet another red herring, as in the stories about SAS pranksters that I exposed as an April Fool's prank in 2018? (see **FT376:16-17**)

Without any supporting evidence, such as a diary entry, it is just another story in the ever-evolving legend that has spawned 20 books, dozens of documentaries and several TV films. Loutzenheiser's account has similarities with those of two other young US airmen, Larry Warren and Adrian Bustinza. Warren, who was just 19 at the time, claims he was also driven, as part of a military convoy, into the forest late at night and had his rifle confiscated. On entering a clearing, he saw Security Police milling around and a glowing misty object shaped like a huge aspirin sitting in a clearing.

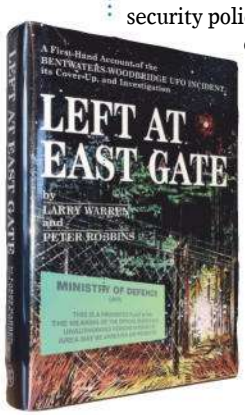
Then a basketball-shaped light fell from the sky, followed by a flash of light that illuminated what he described as "a machine, object or craft", triangle or delta-shaped, that was sitting on the ground.

Warren's story has been widely disputed by the others involved and his account has been disowned by Peter Robbins with whom he co-wrote a book, *Left at East Gate*. But it forms the centre of a long-awaited documentary film, *Capel Green*, due for release later this year. In the film Warren goes much further, with elaborate descriptions of 'non-human' creatures that allegedly emerged from the landed UFO. These beings communicated with senior officers, including someone he believes was the Twin Base's US Wing Commander, Gordon Williams.

In the film Warren claims the alien contact was filmed by US security police and that it appeared the commanders were *expecting* it. He also mentions the presence of British police officers at the scene along with Lt Col Charles Halt, whose memo to the Ministry of Defence sparked off the whole furore when it was published by the *News of the World* on 2 October 1983.



"WE WERE CALLED TO THE BASE SECURITY OFFICE AND TOLD WHAT WE HAD SEEN WAS TOP SECRET"



Warren was quoted in the 1983 story under the pseudonym 'Art Wallace'. At that stage he was the first alleged military eyewitness to the events in the forest to speak on the record. But rumours of a UFO landing and contact between USAF officials and aliens, who had been repairing their craft, had been circulating in ufology since early in the new year of 1981.

In the *News of the World*, 2 October 1983, Warren is quoted as saying that afterwards, "We were all called to the base security office at Bentwaters and told what we had seen had been classified top secret. We were made to sign official USAF documents saying we understood that if we talked we could be punished… one guy added that if we did talk, bullets were cheap…"

Both Halt and the base commander, Col Ted Conrad, have poured cold water on Warren's stories. The former denies that Warren was present during his own extended sortie into Rendlesham Forest during which he and other USAF personnel had their own dramatic UFO sighting on the night of 28/29 December.

But Halt has muddied the waters himself, accusing both the US and UK governments of having "subverted the significance" of the Rendlesham incident via the "use of well-practised methods of disinformation".

For his part, Brigadier General Williams has said nothing since 2003, when he told the makers of a documentary for the Science Fiction Channel the whole thing was "a flight of fancy".

In 2010 and again in 2016 during a visit to East Anglia, Halt's boss, the Base Commander Col Ted Conrad, told me he was bemused by the whole bandwagon and its promoters.

Conrad said the UFO stories had grown and become more elaborate each year, to the extent that they resembled the plot for a science fiction novel.

INDIGO TRANSMIT FILMS

ABOVE: Larry Warren (left) and Gary Heseltine in Rendlesham Forest for the filming of *Capel Green*. **BELOW:** David Clarke and Col Ted Conrad (right), Bentwaters/Woodbridge base commander at the time of the incident.

THE APOLLO BOILERPLATE STORY

Who or what to believe? As Mark Twain wrote in *Huckleberry Finn*: "You pays your money and takes your choice."

But *what* could be so embarrassing that it had to be covered up with an elaborate UFO story? And if there was a cover-up, why were so many people involved? If you wish to keep something secret, the fewer people who know about it the better.

One possibility is that Loutzenheiser is describing a genuine event of some kind, possibly a joint exercise with US and UK forces, in another time frame. His account of the dropped object raises another 'red herring' that has occasionally surfaced as an alternative possible explanation for the Rendlesham incident.

Until at least 1983 a large metal 'boilerplate' replica of an Apollo module was on display at RAF Woodbridge, outside the home of the 67th ARRS. As mentioned earlier, the 67th's primary role was the rescue of aircrew who had crashed or ejected either in friendly territory or behind enemy lines. They were equipped with HH53 'Jolly Green Giant' helicopters and C-130 Hercules transports.

The squadron had a secondary task: locating and recovering US space hardware, including Skylab, the Space Shuttle (from 1981) and possibly even the remains of Soviet rockets and satellites that NASA and other more secret US agencies wished to examine. According to one version of the legend sent to me in 2017:

"During the Christmas week of 1980 RAF Woodbridge and RAF Bentwaters (the sister base to Woodbridge and only a couple of miles away) were on low alert with the Woodbridge control tower un-manned and the Bentwaters tower only with a 'duty' crew on board. There was no flying from both bases during that week. On the 25th of December 1980 (Christmas Day) the 67th ARRS decided to let off steam and pull a practical joke on the Security Police and Law Enforcement officers at the close by RAF Bentwaters, the sister base to RAF Woodbridge. The 67th ARRS were big practical jokers as were many other units in the USAF.

DAVID CLARKE

"The plan was to carry the BP [Apollo boilerplate] under a HH-53 Jolly Green Giant helicopter and drop in on the flight line of the Bentwaters base. The idea being that the Bentwaters SP/LE would think a real Apollo capsule had come down on the base complete with 3 ARRS crew members dressed in HAZMAT suits as Apollo 'crew'.

"Late in the evening on the 25th/26th, the HH-53 headed east across the Woodbridge flightline with the capsule underneath on the winch cable. However everything did not go to plan. As they approached the end of the runway, they clipped the approach landing lights causing the BP to swing. This in turn made the helicopter unstable and the crew had to drop the BP into the nearby Rendlesham forest (off base and onto official UK territory).

"After the HH-53 had dropped the capsule, the Bentwaters SPs were alerted to some strange lights and goings on it the woods. The young Security police reported encountering strange lights and a strange conical shaped UFO in the woods – thus the famous Rendlesham forest UFO case was born. BP-1206 was what caused the whole thing."

The Apollo boilerplate story has gained so much traction that it appears in an online history of the 67th ARRS as the true explanation for the Rendlesham incident. In another online forum, where the capsule is discussed, a former member of the squadron claims: "Following the Rendlesham UFO incident it [the boilerplate] was moved away from its site in front of the 67th hanger to a secluded spot out of the view of the public."

This rumour was resurrected in 2017 in a story published by the *Daily Express* after a photograph of the boilerplate, on display at Patrick AFB in Florida was shown at a UFO convention. This tabloid story was published in the same month that Kurt Loutzenheiser originally contacted me with his account. Another coincidence?

Sadly, although it might initially sound plausible, the Apollo capsule 'theory' is false, much like the SAS prank. The contact who told the Apollo story claimed that 99 per cent of the base personnel were *unaware* of the presence of the Apollo boilerplate at RAF Woodbridge. That is nonsense, says Kurt Loutzenheiser:

"Everyone I knew stationed there knew about the boilerplate. The 67th had one for training, which was NOT the same size as an Apollo capsule – it only needed to be approximately the same weight so was solid metal. As you drove up to the 67th squadron there was one in their 'front yard' and was also solid steel.

"Nobody in their right mind is going to believe a US Super Jolly helicopter took off from Woodbridge (without permission) as a practical joke or that it flew over the base unnoticed regardless of the time. It also would have had to fly directly over the security police at the East Gate unnoticed.

"I have heard part of this story a long time ago and I think it originated with someone from the 67th trying to take credit for a great practical joke that never happened. From what I remember the 67th had no crew on the base, they had some people on alert only to be called in if necessary."

So another invented story about the Rendlesham Forest UFOs bites the dust. How long before a new one takes its place? But what was that 'dropped object' that Kurt Loutzenheiser saw in Rendlesham Forest?

In November, Dr Jon Kosloski the Director of the US Government's Aerial Anomaly Resolution Office told a Press roundtable that AARO plans to release the results of its analysis of some "interesting historical UFO incidents" in volume 2 of its Historical Report. Kosloski said the second part will address a number of old cases they have resolved, including claims of alleged UFO sightings near nuclear facilities and ICBM silos. Will the RAF Bentwaters-Woodbridge incidents be among them?

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***Capel Green*, a film by Dion M Johnston, is due for release on 21 February.**

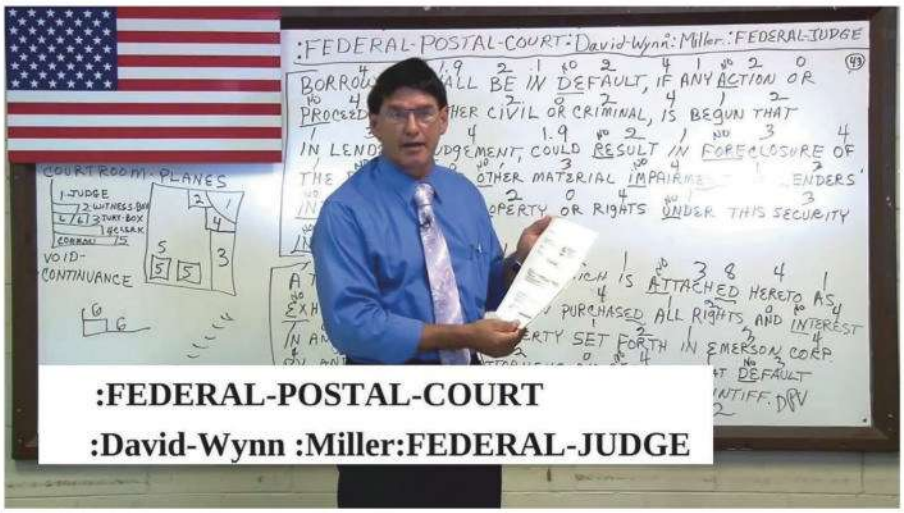
GOING POSTAL

Does a secret One-World Government of bomb-delivering postmen and strict Grammar Nazis really rule our world from behind the scenes? **S-D: FULL-COLON TUCKER** parses the strange rise of the Quantum Grammar movement, finding its writings ironically make very little sense indeed.

What would be the best, most accurate, way to 'deliver' bombs to their intended targets from within military aeroplanes, do you think? How about to place postage stamps on them? Parcels generally get safely to their intended locations, don't they? That's why, prior to the bombing of Pearl Harbor in 1941, the cunning Japanese placed one dollar US postage stamps on each individual item of payload; that way, the Postmaster General of Honolulu could legally and efficiently deliver them onto the desired addresses of the US Navy ships and warplanes waiting exposed below like static tin houses.

Sticking with infamous explosion-related matters, how did the Twin Towers *really* collapse on 9/11, back in 2001? Everyone knows there was something suspicious about the way the whole thing went down; metal structures that huge and reinforced shouldn't buckle and melt so quickly, even if large aeroplanes do go crashing right into their side before exploding in a pair of massive, fuel-filled fireballs. The only conceivable answer was that secret agents of the international postal authorities had sneaked into the skyscrapers beforehand, replacing each and every metallic object inside, like chairs, tables and filing cabinets, with superficially identical plastic-based replicas instead. Then, the cowardly postal-bombers blew these items all up from a safe distance simultaneously, using remote-detonated stores of C-4, the synchronised blast-wave creating a giant magnetic pulse which truly brought the buildings down. At the very second of collapse, $12 trillion was electronically transferred from a special computer in the basement of the World Trade Center towers to a hidden Post Office savings account in Singapore, thus making it not a terrorist attack at all, but the most cunning postal robbery in all of human history. This could all be accomplished, of course, because C-4 is a 'plastic explosive' – it is chemically designed specifically to make plastic explode. In this way, one could perhaps employ a well-modified Kinder Egg capsule as a miniature hand-grenade. [1]

These were the opinions of one David Wynn Miller, an immortal US conspiracy theorist (since deceased) and secret President, King of Hawaii and Postmaster General of the entire planet, and therefore



ABOVE: David Wynn Miller (or :David-Wynn :Miller) explains the rules of Quantum Grammar.

CLIENTS TURN UP IN COURT WITH POSTAGE STAMPS STUCK OVER THEM

perhaps the most significant world statesman you've never heard of. At first glance, you might be forgiven for presuming his theories were based simply upon misinterpretations of the words 'deliver' and 'plastic explosive', but this is not so, for Miller (or 'Judge: David-Wynn: Miller', or simply 'Full-Colon Miller', as he preferred) was also the inventor of a new form of magic language called 'Quantum Grammar', which allowed him to arbitrarily alter the import of any given word into meaning whatever he wanted it to mean – appropriately enough for a man who in and of himself clearly gave a whole new meaning to the words 'total lunatic'. And yet, like all politicians, no matter how fringe, Full-Colon Miller had his own loyal constituency, one which continues to lend him their full postal-vote support even today.

TALKING THROUGH HIS COLON

Miller is often identified as a member of the 'Sovereign Citizen' movement, those libertarian-cum-anarchist groups and individuals who believe all formally recognised national governments are legally illegitimate, and that therefore they themselves may operate as sovereign stateless entities over and above the law – because there really *is* no such law, it's all just a nationalistic legal fiction. Mr Full-Colon thought his own Quantum Grammar was the only true language on Earth, and so automatically superseded all mere ordinary government-written laws of man. This caused him to happily lend his learned support to several overly trusting clients in the dock down the years, all of whom were advised to plead 'Not: Guilty' on bizarre pseudo-legal grounds revolving obsessively around the twin concepts of postage stamps and weird punctuation. Miller made the astute observation that the Universal Postal Union (UPU) – a transnational body which helps you get letters successfully from Tokyo to Timbuktu – operates above and beyond the auspices of individual sovereign countries. From this, he concluded UPU actually secretly controlled the world, and that as such it was possible to immediately escape any given national legal system simply by affixing a stamp to any given legal document, treaty or contract, thereby irrevocably switching the authority under which it was governed over to UPU – of which he declared himself Head, and thus Benign World Dictator – instead.

This clever trick even extended to human beings, leading Miller to recommend his

ABOVE: Mark Christopher, quantum fraudster of colour and ":Plenipotentiary-Judge &: Muster-Master" among other things, currenty serving seven years in a British prison.
BELOW: Jared Lee Loughner, who shot US Congresswoman Gabby Giffords in the head in 2011, may have been partly inspired by Wynn's teachings.

clients turn up in court with postage stamps stuck all over them; thus they would instantly outrank the judges and walk free. In 2001, Canadian couple Paul and Myrna Schuck attended trial facing charges of tax evasion wearing little self-made laminated ID badges onto which they had affixed postage stamps bearing the head of Queen Elizabeth II, the nation's official Head of State. Simply by doing this, and writing their names on QEII's head, Miller had told the Schucks they now automatically assumed a position of power equal to that of Liz herself, and thus that no Canadian court had any authority over them whatsoever. The presiding judge disagreed, handing out a 30-day sentence to each of them. Another Canadian defendant plastered stamps all over his arm, attempting to reclassify himself as a large international parcel, subject only to the authority of UPU. Unsurprisingly, all of Miller's known 'clients' – he generally just fed them mad legal advice and documents, then sat back and watched as they comically (mis)represented themselves in court – lost their cases.

Some faced far more serious charges than the Schucks, ranging from child molestation to aggravated assault and a $30 million mortgage scam. Ironically, some of Full-Colon's other clients subsequently accrued additional legal woes related to their actual Millerite defence tactics, unknowingly committing crimes like contempt of court, "paper terrorism" and "simulating legal process". One man used Miller's teachings to sue the US Federal Government for its "improper use of grammar", accusing Washington, in true colon-filled Quantum Grammar, of producing infantile and illiterate legal documents with "a second-grade-reading-level and: writing-level and: vacating-facts, opinions, guessing,

modifications, void factual-syntax-grammar word-meanings", not to mention making unspecified "babbling-collusions-threats" against the plaintiff.

Miller's most notorious presumed (though never officially confirmed) disciple was Jared Lee Loughner, the unhinged gun-nut who famously blasted US Congresswoman Gabby Giffords in the head at point-blank range back in 2011 during a mass shooting, leaving her miraculously alive, but severely cognitively disabled. It was never precisely clear why Loughner did this, but some commentators have observed distinct similarities between certain of his statements and the teachings of Full-Colon Miller. Loughner had an extreme grammar obsession himself, and had previously confronted Giffords at a public meeting, demanding to know: "What is government if words have no meaning?" Governments abuse language all the time, of course – don't terms like 'social justice' or 'fairer taxes' have different meanings to different politicians? – but in an online video, Loughner had warned (ironically rather ungrammatically) that "The government is implying mind control and brainwash on the people by controlling grammar" – sick of mind, and *sic* of speech too. In a 2006 interview, Full-Colon said he agreed with Loughner's opinion here, whilst also denying ever knowing the man and pointing out that his creeds were freely available online. Admitting no culpability, Full-Colon Dave instead suggested Loughner may have been mind-controlled by the US Government to commit his atrocity, presumably via occult grammarian means. [2]

POSTMAN PATRONAGE

David Wynn Miller has disciples here in the UK too, some of whom made headlines in October after being sentenced for attempting to kidnap a coroner on the utterly delusional grounds that he was actually some kind of "necromancer", which normal dictionaries will tell you means a sorceror with the ability to raise the dead, but which possibly means something else entirely within the specific lingo of Quantum Grammar. Following Miller's death, his role as unelected ruler of the British province of the Universal Postal Union has since been taken up by a convicted 59-year-old black fraudster named Mark Christopher, who claims to have been the inspiration for the equally brownish-hued DC Comics superheroes depicted in the recent Hollywood movies *Black Adam* and *Shazam! Fury of the Gods*, both of which he says represent thinly veiled retellings of "the power that I have". Posing as "Chief

Judge of England and All Dominions", Christopher had been operating an online university, selling seminars, self-study programmes and personal consultations for up to £7,499 a pop, attracting at least 280 paying subscribers. Via his deep knowledge of Quantum Grammar, Christopher reportedly promised to make his clients' legal and financial problems disappear, but for some of his more committed followers he only caused far more severe judicial summonses to pop through the letter-box instead.

His star pupils were Sean and Shiza Harper from Essex, who were "groomed" into believing 'Shazam' could make their "unlawful" mortgage debt vanish by proving their contract was invalid under Quantum Grammar. In April 2023, Christopher also managed to persuade the Harpers that, if they turned up at a local coroner's court in a car covered in silly invented 'sheriff' logos, and kidnapped Necromancer Lincoln Brookes, the Senior Coroner for Essex, this would cause a global revolution by inspiring his other followers in Australia and Ireland to rise up and overthrow their non-UPU-backed oppressors too. In his purported capacity as head of something called the Federal Postal Court, Christopher appointed Shiza – a former genuine Metropolitan Police Special Constable – as a full "postal inspector and auditor", giving her the supposed authority to enter any address where post could be delivered to "check it out". Donning a hi-vis jacket, Shiza and her posse comitatus rode out to handcuff Brookes and cart him off to the nearest police station (why not Post Office?) to face "corporal punishment if need be" upon serious charges of … something. "Interfering with the dead" may be the best guess. Unfortunately, on the day they arrived at the coroner's court, Brookes happened not to be there, causing the cultists to leave empty-handed, but not before pronouncing they would "seek a death sentence" against him nonetheless, as the representative of an illicit governmental "Nazi regime" which planned to kick down parents' doors and "mutilate [their] children for surgery", a presumable reference to transgender operations.

Charged with conspiracy to commit false imprisonment, ':Mark-kishon: Christopher. :Plenipotentiary-Judge &: Muster-Master.', as he calls himself online, received seven years behind bars, while the Harpers got 30 months each, besides having their home repossessed for non-payment of mortgage fees. Yet this is not yet the end of the matter, as the regime in HMP Wherever appears so lax that Christopher is still being allowed to operate his online 'university' from within its walls, the publicity from his court case serving to attract many new followers! Continuing to market his books, with titles like *The Facts That Destroy All Parliamentary Systems, Governments & Their Acts, Volumes 1-4*, he has thanked followers for making him "so very rich" because of them becoming his "friends" online and urged them to prepare to rise up again and "purge all hijackers" some fine future day. Perhaps Quantum Grammar is true after all, then, because that doesn't really sound like the real meaning of the words 'prison' or 'punishment' to me… [3]

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LEFT: The bizarre logo on the Pearsons' car in which they intended to kidnap Essex Senior Coronor Lincoln Brookes.

HE SURGICALLY REMOVED HIS KIDNEYS AND HIS ADRENAL GLAND

STAMP OF AUTHORITY

Who was the original and inspirational Judge: David-Wynn: Miller? Born in Ohio in 1949, his only significant childhood experience was being abducted by aliens at the age of eight. He then became a humble welder, a man of no especial further note until 1975, when he was ineptly operated upon by a Korean surgeon who didn't speak English properly. Supposedly, he completely misread Miller's chart, surgically removing both of his kidneys and his adrenal gland, killing him stone dead for 30 minutes. On the autopsy slab, the pathologist cut out David's heart, which spontaneously began beating again. Quickly stitched back inside Miller's chest, this organ made the corpse become reanimated. Now possessing post-resurrection super-powers, due to an abrupt boost in bodily endorphin levels and consequent death of his "ageing genes", the newly immortal Miller became happily stuck at the age of 25 forever… until dying in 2018, aged nearly 70.

Nonetheless, his lifetime accomplishments in the combined fields of superhero-dom, global politics, law, science, linguistics, and efficient international parcel delivery services, were great and impressive indeed. The comprehensive and adulatory list provided by Wikipedia deserves to be reproduced in full:

*"He sleeps only three hours a day, and at one point didn't sleep at all for a period of eight consecutive years * He is a 92nd-degree Mason * He has 3 PhDs * He has a 200 IQ, and it keeps increasing * He is a specialist in 115 fields, including History, Genealogy, Masonry, Biotechnology, Metallurgy, Polymer Technology, Heat-Treating, Nuclear Physics, String Theory and Quantum Physics * He built a perpetual motion machine * He reads 400 words a second * His website is in 150 different languages and has five billion members * He proved that every word in the English language has 900 definitions * He took six years to develop Quantum Language Parse Syntax Grammar (QLPSG) and published the results to the internet in 1988 * QLPSG allows him to write any sentence in any language 'frontwards' and backwards with the same meaning * Implementing QLPSG would stop all wars on Earth and allow us to communicate with aliens * In converting a trust to QLPSG, he 'broke' $40 trillion in trusts held in the United States * The secret service told him that QLPSG disqualified every treaty, trust, and contract for the last 8,500 years * He was responsible for the collapse of the United States mortgage industry * The surrender treaty signed by the Confederacy was not a valid document (not in QLPSG), so the southern states [of the US] are still independent * He has shut down the entire US Federal government 23 times * He owns the patent on the US flag * He is a 'world icon' * He was an ambassador to China * He was elected King of Hawaii * He is a Chief Federal Judge in Australia and New Zealand * He is a Chief in 14 American Indian tribes * He is the 'Plenipotentiary Chief Federal Judge' of the United States of America, with the power to prosecute other judges * He is the sovereign of his own country – 'the land of the courtroom during the time of contract' – appointed to him by the UN * He has absolute power over all things on the planet * All countries worldwide are controlled by the Universal Postal Union [and he is its leader]".*

However, despite (or perhaps because?) of such amazing accomplishments, at some point in the 1980s his then-wife unaccountably decided to divorce him, with clever-clever lawyers bamboozling him in court every time during no fewer than 67 subsequent child custody hearings, using incomprehensible legalese he just could not grasp, despite his 200-plus IQ. Combined with his prior mishap involving a linguistically

inept Korean, this taught Miller the profound importance of grammar, a subject he looked into in some depth, scientifically determining that the addition of colons and hyphens to a person's name transformed that person into "a prepositional phrase". People were not their mere *names*, they were their living *bodies* and *souls*, and rewriting your name with colons and hyphens somehow acknowledged this, representing not one's lower existence as a legal entity, but as an animate "fact" of life existing in the "now-time-dimension". Your normally transcribed birth certificate name represented your existence not as a full human person, simply as a taxable administrative unit. The legal entity known as David Wynn Miller could be legally taxed by Uncle Sam. The higher-level living entity known as David-Wynn: Miller could not. So, simply by signing your name in Quantum Grammar on your tax-return from hereon in, you escaped all liability from taxation – hence Miller's subsequent appeal to ordinary, penny-pinching tax-dodgers and members of the Sovereign Citizen movement alike. Over a billion solid citizens, including former President Bill Clinton and the entire US Supreme Court, eagerly became students of his jurisprudence, while in gratitude for having "turned Hawaii into a verb" he was acclaimed as its rightful King and Postmaster. He also argued that, should anything ever happen to his beloved UPU, Earth could be governed instead under International Maritime Law, even the land-based bits, as, considered properly, "Earth is a vessel in the sea of space." [4]

USING BAD LANGUAGE

What's 'Quantum' about all this, though? If you extract samples of it from his website, Miller's lingo just sounds like a load of gibberish: "~14 FOR AN "APPEARANCE" OF THE "UNITED-STATES-POSTAL-VESSEL-BUILDING(INSIDE-"CLOSED-AREA")(BANKING-SERVICES)(COURT-ROOM-(CLOSED-AREA)OF A FOREIGN-FLAG-CORPORATION WITH THE YELLOW-FRINGE, BRAIDS, SPEARS, EAGLE, BALL, ACORN OR WITH A DIMENSIONAL-MODIFICATIONS) OF THE NATIONAL-FLAG OF THE HOME-COUNTRY-WORLD-WIDE ARE WITH THE MODIFICATION-FICTIONAL-COMMUNICATIONS OF THE FOREIGN-FICTION-STATE AS THE COURTHOUSE-FOREIGN-VESSEL IN THE DRY-DOCK UNDER THE GUISE-DRYDOCK OF THE UNITED-STATES-POST-("UNION"=NO-CONTRACT OR: NO-FACT) OF THE HOME-COUNTRY'S-PORT-AUTHORITIES … ~22 FOR THE NEGATIVE-REMARKS "FROM PEOPLE" "WHO BROKE" "THE FICTIONAL-LAWS" AND "USE A FICTIONAL-FRUIT-SALAD-MIX WITH THE C.-S.-S.-C.-S.-G. AND ADVERB-VERB" ARE WITH THE LACK OF THE C.-S.-S.-C.-P.-S.-G.-KNOWLEDGE AND

PA IMAGES / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

WITH THE GUESSING OF A FICTIONAL-GUISE." [5] No, me neither, I'm afraid.

There are some basic rules to Quantum Grammar, for those in the know. All sentences must have at least 13 words, and should be readable both backwards and forwards, like the word ABBA. Any word which starts with a vowel followed by two consonants automatically invalidates any legal contracts within which it appears, however – so, in this case, the word ABBA is actually illegitimate, meaning the Swedish band in question could never successfully sue or be sued. The paradoxically legal-illegal status of the word ABBA is characteristically confusing, as Miller promised Quantum Grammar could render the meaning of any word or phrase 100 per cent definite and non-ambiguous, or "static and absolute", whilst concurrently allowing him to say it meant whatever random thing he wanted it to. Does the word 'fence' refer to a thin, wall-like barrier, an act of swordfighting, or a seller-on of black-market goods? Quantum Grammar could provide a definitive solution… whilst also allowing Miller himself to determine the word 'fence' also meant something hitherto unrelated and unexpected, like 'accordion', 'Israel', 'elephant' or 'pineapple'. This is in accordance with the laws of quantum physics, hence the language's name. You can purchase a third-party course in Quantum Grammar online, where the advertising spiel draws a parallel between the wave-particle duality of photons, which appear to be particles when observed from one perspective and waves from another, and words like 'fence', which mean one thing in one context, and something else in another. All words thus possess quantum energy, and can have a definite solid meaning sometimes, and an arbitrary, invented one at others. Thus, a true Quantum Grammar muster-master can interpret a contract any way they like in court, and always be legally correct – in

LEFT: Sean and Shiza Harper arriving at Chelmsford Crown Court.

theory, anyway. A bit of paper saying 'IOU' can marvellously become one saying 'IOU NOTHING'. [6]

But are these loonies dangerous? We can draw a quantum of solace from the fact most of Miller's political followers are simply desperate and naïve people in debt, dangers only to themselves. Yet, as the cases of the Mark Christopher cult and (allegedly) Jared Lee Loughner show, sometimes these people do display potential for violence. But this threat can be inflated – several online cult-watch sources like the Southern Poverty Law Center claim Millerites are somehow 'far-right', 'fascists' or even literal 'Grammar Nazis', which seems overblown. Aren't they just a bunch of generic nuts? Miller has followers amongst US black nationalist movements, and Mark Christopher was himself non-white, which most white supremacists tend not to be. Plus, in their intense desire to replace national sovereignty with transnational postal law, you could (equally dubiously) argue they're really much more like left-wing EU-lovers than right-wing Brexiteers (at least if you just wanted to falsely smear the left, not the right). In their utterly elastic use of words like 'fascist' and 'neo-Nazi' to indicate not actual Hitlerites, as was once traditional, but simply 'people whose views I don't like', maybe these Sovereign Citizens' more rabid critics are actually employing some classic Quantum Grammar methods of their own?

NOTES

1 https://rationalwiki.org/wiki/David_Wynn_Miller; www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/intelligence-report/2003/full-colon-miller

2 https://albertalawreview.com/index.php/ALR/article/view/2485/2470; https://web.archive.org/web/20170823210230/http://www.cyberclass.net/miller2.htm; www.splcenter.org/hatewatch/2012/02/14/%E2%80%98sovereign-citizen%E2%80%99-sues-government-over-grammar; www.theguardian.com/world/2011/jan/10/gabrielle-giffords-shooting-grammar-extremist; www.politico.com/story/2011/01/loughners-ties-to-conspiracy-theory-047329

3 www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14043441/judge-cure-cancer-malaria-kidnap-coroner-Essex.html; *Times*, 29 Oct 2024, p.5; *Times*, 2 Nov 2024, p.20.

4 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/David_Wynn_Miller

5 www.dwmlc.net/

6 www.bluheshire.com/unlocking-the-secrets-of-quantum-language

If you want to teach yourself Quantum Grammar, Full-Colon Miller posted a translation of the Lord's Prayer that you can compare to the original and learn from, line by line, here: **www.dwmlc.net/copy-of-hawaii-sovereignty**

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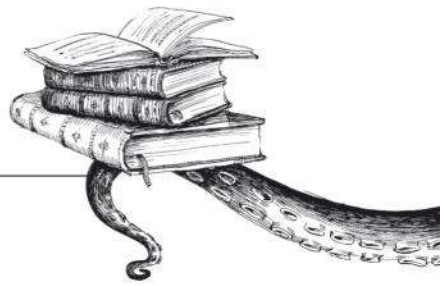


UFOs are here to stay!

Mark Pilkington appreciates an engaging, sweeping yet pleasingly concise history of the UFO phenomenon, and sees how it spread around the world remarkably quickly

After the Flying Saucers Came

A Global History of The UFO Phenomenon

Greg Eghigian

Oxford University Press 2024

Hb, 388pp, £22.99, ISBN 9780190869878

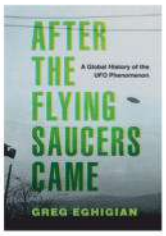
We're now seven years into the longest and most intense UFO – or, if you insist, UAP – flap of our age. Whether more people are actually seeing UFOs than they have in the past is unclear, but there can be no doubt that people in the US, and to a lesser extent elsewhere, are hearing about them, and thus experiencing them, with a greater intensity, and over a longer duration, than at any other time in history. The continuous algorithmic spoon-feeding of news, and the skill with which lobbyists, grifters, cultists and psychological warfare operatives have learned to manipulate them, has led to our media consciousness being permanently colonised.

It's strange to think that two decades ago UFOs were declared a defunct cultural phenomenon, but as American historian Greg Eghigian makes clear in this excellent study, one of the many remarkable abilities of the UFO is that it can vanish from our skies, and from our thoughts, only to return with renewed energy, and sometimes new storylines, several years later.

While the current reboot has demonstrated impressive institutional reach – probing deep into the American body politic and giving birth to a potentially valuable new government organisation – it has ultimately only produced more confusion and division than it has knowledge, while resurrecting decades old, once dead, nonsense stories, like that of Bob Lazar, or Mussolini's crashed spacecraft. Empty saucers do indeed make the most noise.

One positive, however, is that the UFO has reached a sufficient level of cultural maturity to have drawn the attention of thinkers and writers who bring their training from other disciplines, particularly within the humanities, to the subject, creating fresh pathways across a well-trodden field. Eghigian's book is a welcome, and significant, contribution to this new ufology, and presents us with a history that is both very global, and very human.

As forteans we're well aware that the range of phenomena associated with UFOs, such as



mysterious lights and interactions with non-human entities, are as old as time and exist everywhere on our planet. We also know that the dominant interpretation of them as extraterrestrial vehicles is firmly rooted in the mid-20th-century American imagination. Yet UFOs travelled further across our planet, and more rapidly, than many of us might previously have realised. Noting an early Turkish sighting from 1948 included in the US Air Force's Project Blue Book files, Eghigian remarks: "The US Air Force was keeping tabs on UFO reports from other parts of the world. How did it do this and, especially given its professed scepticism, why?"

Charting the early, global spread of the phenomenon, Eghigian makes the important point that newly developed news agencies like Associated Press and Reuters meant that the same stories, usually American in origin, could now appear rapidly in Europe, South America, Scandinavia – almost anywhere on Earth, except perhaps China and the Soviet Union. Sometimes these stories took on regional variations that appealed to local audiences, but usually they were flattened to fit the standardised American saucer model. Demonstrating the influencing power that these stories held in a world still very much on edge after the war, Eghigian refers to Italian UFO historian Giuseppe Stilo who found that across 40 countries the first recorded UFO sightings – or reports of sightings – were documented a mere 14 to 18 days following news of Kenneth Arnold's, in June 1947.

UFOs can vanish from our skies, and from our thoughts, only to return with renewed energy

Eghigian's focus shifts deftly, and sometimes dizzyingly, from the panoramic to the close-up and keeps the story firmly rooted in the human, particularly in the efforts of individuals and organisations seeking to document, investigate and make sense of UFOs and their attendant phenomena. The role that civilian and amateur UFO groups, and their many publications, have played in charting and shaping this history can't be overstated, but is all too often overlooked; so Eghigian is to be particularly commended for the time he's spent inside the archives of groups from all over the world. I was personally pleased to see regular appearances by the crew of the *Merseyside UFO Bulletin*, later *Magonia*, and FT's own Jenny Randles, but we also learn about groups in Brazil, China, Germany, Russia and elsewhere.

Eghigian approaches UFO events with the objectivity of the professional historian – considering them as texts, exploring their veracity from within the frame of contemporary discussion, rather than imposing retrospective explanations or interpretations upon them. Informed readers may occasionally find his even-handedness frustrating, but it's important to remember that even the flimsiest of cases can make a profound impact, and a UFO's personal, social and cultural impressions are always deeper than those left by its hull.

One area in which Eghigian, as an historian of medicine and mental health, takes a firm position, is his examination of the alien abduction mania of the 1980s and 1990s. He draws necessary parallels between the contemporaneous Satanic Ritual Abuse panic – as *Magonia* and others did at the time – and critiques the role of the "alien abduction expert", almost always a man of course, noting that "the alien abduction experience cannot be separated from the production of its stories, from the process of how their tales got told, heard, and spread".

It's telling that Eghigian's engaging, sweeping yet pleasingly concise history largely concludes here, at the close of the abduction era. And if there's any dissatisfaction to be felt after reading it, it's only with the current manifestation of the UFO phenomenon itself which feels crassly unimaginative, brutally dogmatic, endlessly bureaucratic and almost entirely joyless in comparison to previous incarnations – something future Eghigians will no doubt have plenty to say about.

★★★★★

Revisiting TV SF classics

Smegging excellent fannish book, says **David V Barrett**, but exterminate the official offering

Red Dwarf: Discovering the TV Series

Volume 1: 1988-1993

Tom Salinsky

White Owl/Pen & Sword 2024

Hb, 192pp, £20, ISBN 9781399034944

I, Tardis

Memoirs of an Impossible Blue Box

Steve Cole

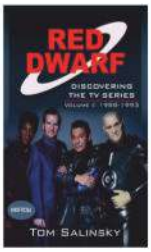
BBC Books 2024

Hb, 303pp, £19.99, ISBN 9781785948985

Books about TV series can be very variable. These two, about the two longest-lasting SF series on British TV, are a case in point.

Volume 1 of *Red Dwarf: Discovering the TV Series* covers the first six seasons, from 1988 to 1993. Playwright and podcaster Tom Salinsky is a self-confessed fan of *Red Dwarf*, and this book is fannish and unofficial and all the better for it.

He covers each episode with a couple of pages of commentary: a brief introduction, then a number of headings, including "That Rimmer's a solid guy", "Influences, refer-ences and rip-offs", "Best gag", "Worst visual effect" and "Continuity is for smegheads". And like any tru-fan, Salinsky doesn't pull his punches; if an episode doesn't work, he says so, and why. The book ends with rankings; of the 36 episodes, only three ("Back to Reality", "Dimension Jump" and "Quarantine", all from seasons 4 and 5) get 5 stars, and a further 12 get 4½ or 4 stars – but six only get 2 stars, and one, "Waiting for God" from season 1, which he describes as "nobody's favourite episode", gets a single star.



The episode guides may take up most of the space, but it's the introduction to each season that really makes the book worthwhile. Salinsky goes through the troubled origins of *Red Dwarf*. The first draft of the first script was written in 1983, but no one at the BBC was in the slightest interested; it wouldn't be until February 1988, and a massive amount of persistence by creators Rob Grant and Doug Naylor, that it was finally broadcast. Then series by series it was beset by further problems; it's quite amazing that having finally staggered to a start, it ever continued.

A shame my proof copy didn't have the promised 32 colour illustrations, but Salinsky's book charts all the ups and downs of the series with huge amounts of fascinating information, reaching some way towards the heights of Keith Topping's superlative *Slayer* books about *Buffy* – and that's high praise indeed.

In contrast, *I, Tardis* is an official BBC *Doctor Who* production. It's supposedly the *Memoirs of an Impossible Blue Box* "as told to Steve Cole", who used to be in charge of BBC Worldwide's Doctor Who merchandising, and was executive producer on the Big Finish Productions range of *Doctor Who* audio dramas. It's glossy, with photos (largely black-and-white on the first 56 pages, then colour) on almost every page. It could have been, and should have been, great fun – but it's a manufactured mess, and comes over as simply yet-another-TV-cash-in – and a bad one.

The Tardis's voice in the book is horribly wrong throughout. "...oh, Doctor, the War is not over! Will it never be over? There's one last broken Dalek – but Bad Wolf's fixed it then nixed it. The Doctor's mad and then he's sad and I feel his guilt so bad..."

Simply dreadful.

Red Dwarf ★★★★

I, Tardis ★

The Seven Wonders of the Ancient World

Bettany Hughes

Weidenfeld & Nicolson 2024

Pb, 416pp, £12.99, ISBN 9781474610346

Bettany Hughes is a highly-acclaimed ancient historian and prolific with TV documentaries. Her previous books include a lively biography of Socrates.

As evidenced by her 24-page bibliography, she has many predecessors on the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World. There are also many websites, both collective and on individual Wonders.

She does, though, ignore several striking matters. The classical world had no National Trusts or World Heritage sites (UNESCO lists 1,154 sites). Individual writers compiled their own lists as they saw fit.

For instance, Diodorus Siculus says many wanted to add a Babylonian obelisk, while Philo of Byzantium and the poet Antipater replaced the Pharos Lighthouse with its Walls.

All the Greek Wonders are Hellenistic (Alexander to Cleopatra). Hughes exaggerates at others' expense Alexander's connections with them.

To modern taste, the most remarkable omission from all lists must be the Parthenon: simply not big enough? It is actually hard to find any glowing ancient description. The traveller Pausanias's account is more interested in its statues and paintings than the building itself.

It may be surprising that two of the Wonders are non-Greek, given the general Greek disdain for "barbarian" accomplishments.

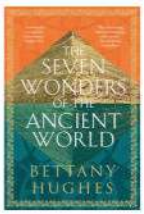
Indeed, the word "pyramid" is derived from a Greek word for cup-cake, obviously mocking, whilst Fronto dismissed the Giza monuments as "futile".

Centuries later, Romans and Christians got a look in via compilations by such as the Venerable Bede. The most predictable Roman accretion was the Colosseum. Hughes usefully postscripts many more modern lists.

She devotes one chapter to each Wonder, buttressed by 540 often-packed end notes, black-and-white illustrations, colour plates, and various historical charts.

See myself (**FT158:21**) on the Great Pyramid. I recall entering this musty, bat-infested edifice (1963). As with, say, Stonehenge, there are many daft theories about its purpose. FT readers would have liked something about Piazzi Smyth's invention of the so-called prophetic measurement "Pyramid Inch", causing him to be dubbed "the Great Pyramidiot". See also the 1955 movie *Land of the Pharaohs*.

Babylon's Hanging Gardens remain a mystery. Many dismiss them as fictitious; others relocate them to Nineveh, where there is better attestation. Hughes leans this way. Antipater claims to have seen them. But Herodotus' silence is conclusive for many.



Rather than sneer at Saddam Hussein's reconstructed temple, Hughes would have done better to acknowledge his water-engineers' efforts to understand the Gardens' hydraulics.

Of the others, there is only space to note the other Wonders are all religious except the Pharos. The Colossus of Rhodes did not straddle the harbour (cf. the execrable eponymous 1951 movie). Artemis's Mausoleum gave us the word; Hughes's suggested influences on American Presidential tombs might have been extended to the Taj Mahal. A certain Herostratus burned down the Temple of Artemis to gain immortal fame.

For its often astounding erudition, breadth and depth, and (save for Alexander) sound historical judgement, this book is a winner.

Barry Baldwin

★★★★★

Magic Realms

The Art of Fighting Fantasy

Ian Livingstone & Jonathan Green

Unbound 2024

Hb, 354pp, £30, ISBN 9781800183650

It's the tongue you notice first. Spiky, lolling, somehow inherently malevolent, it protrudes between the Shape Changer's jagged teeth as he picks his way across a sun-dappled forest glade.

Painted in elegantly subtle watercolours, Iain McCaig's

cover artwork for *The Forest of Doom* is perhaps the finest illustrative representation of the Tolkienesque realms created by Ian Livingstone and Steve Jackson for their million-selling Fighting Fantasy gamebooks. The word "immersive" has seldom been more appropriate: in the mid-1980s there was a whole generation of schoolkids unable to walk the family dog through their local woods without imagining sword-wielding hobgoblins to the east (turn to 317) or a witch's hut to the west (turn to 38).

This paving slab-sized hardback does an excellent job in showcasing the artwork that has always been an intrinsic part of the Fighting Fantasy ethos.

The format is simple: an exhaustive romp through the range's major artistic contributors in alphabetical order, from the airbrushed dragons of Chris Achilléos to the striking woodcut-influenced yetis of Gary Ward and Edward Crosby.

Livingstone and fellow gamebook writer Jonathan Green provide accompanying text, with some telling and sometimes harshly self-critical evaluations from the artists themselves.

"I still think I blew it, and refused to look at it for years after completion," says Malcolm Barter of his evocative internal illustrations from *The Forest of Doom*, revealing that – for the best part of a decade – he declined to correct rumours on Internet gaming forums about his "possible early death".

For the most part, though, the artwork is deservedly left to speak for itself. Those who last picked up a Fighting Fantasy book in the days when Frankie Goes To Hollywood were topping the charts may find themselves overwhelmed with nostalgia.

"Nobody draws caves, smoke or water quite like Russ Nicholson," claims the text, and Nicholson's visceral illustrations from debut 1982 gamebook *The Warlock of Firetop Mountain* prove he was a dab hand at decomposing zombies, too.

Ian Miller's cover painting for the Borley Rectory-influenced *House of Hell* is blown up to A4 size, emphasising the darkly vivid æsthetic of this controversial 1984 gamebook.

But there are also more recent gems to be found: notably Mike McCarthy's artwork for Livingstone's 2022 book *Shadow of the Giants*, which gives charmingly expressive personalities to the denizens of the Pagan Plains.

Completists will relish the inclusion of all 13 covers of the short-lived *Warlock* magazine and (deep breath) 36 overseas variations on the cover of *The Warlock of Firetop Mountain*; more casual adventurers can simply enjoy a heart-warming return journey through the haunted forests and dastardly dungeons that combined to put 1980s geography homework very firmly on the back burner.

Bob Fischer

★★★★

Jim Morrison, Secret Teacher of the Occult

A Journey to the Other Side

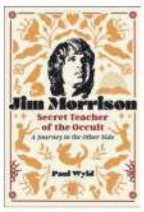
Paul Wyld

Inner Traditions 2024

Pb, 256pp, £18.99, ISBN 9798888500804

For singer-songwriter Paul Wyld, Jim Morrison was more than a musician. Morrison was a secret teacher whose rightful place within the Western esoteric tradition should be recognised.

From Navy brat to Lizard King,



Wyld frames Morrison's life as a hero's journey, a hero whose destiny was "to become a secret teacher/rock star/warrior-poet, a magus, and a shaman while leading an outsider's life on the edge".

Wyld's loosely-chronological mystical biography takes us through the intense and varied influences, both chemical and literary, that shaped Morrison's identity.

The singer cannily cultivated a mythic aura. Dionysus, Alexander the Great, Lawrence of Arabia, Nietzsche: these towering figures from myth, history, and philosophy helped Morrison shape a heroic persona that would only grow in the aftermath of his mysterious death.

Morrison's aim, according to Wyld, fits the secret teacher bill – to wake people up, shatter conformity, and save listeners from despair by offering a door to cosmic consciousness.

Within terms like "rock star" and "rock legend" are associations with astrology and sacred writings. Wyld's freewheeling journey through Morrison's story welcomes these sorts of connections.

A book on Morrison's influence, and influences, reminds us that influence originally referred to an emanation from the stars that shapes one's destiny. Yes, there's wild speculation and quite a bit of improvisation. But Wyld's sense of devotion to his subject shines.

Readers may not break on through to quite the extent that the author has. Yet the history of Western esotericism presented alongside Morrison's life and art shows that the doors between creativity and spirituality remain open to explore.

Mike Pursley

★★★

The Basque Witch-Hunt

A Secret History

Jan Machielsen

Bloomsbury 2024

Hb, 316pp, £25, ISBN 9781350441507

The Basque witch trials of 1609-12 were among the most important in European history.

On the Spanish side of the border, they caused the Inquisition to turn against witch-hunting for good. On the French side they inspired one of the most famous of the books designed to defend and encourage such hunts, that by Pierre de Lancre.

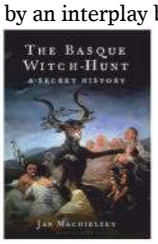
They have proportionately attracted good historians, writing in English as well as in French and Spanish, and Jan Machielsen is a worthy addition to these. His main purpose is to eradicate the traditional view of the French trials as driven on by de Lancre himself. He does so by providing the first detailed account of their local context.

In this, the Basques already had a long record of witch trials, which had recently been augmented by the arrival of the idea of the Satan-worshipping witches' sabbath.

By 1605 Basque youngsters, especially teenagers, were accusing adults, mostly women, of taking them to the sabbath, and the result was a series of trials conducted by local nobles.

The normal legal process was, however, slow and expensive, and the accusations of witchcraft became enmeshed with factional rivalries. As a result, local leaders appealed to the king to send professional judges with powers to conduct rapid hearings, and de Lancre and a colleague duly arrived and held emergency sessions which executed 50 to 100 people in three months, from a small area.

This blitzkrieg was powered by an interplay between three



factors: traditional local beliefs about witchcraft, the creative imaginations of the youthful witnesses, and the interests of the judges.

Some of the witnesses were pushed to testify by frightened parents, while others had grudges against authority figures like parents and priests.

Unusually, little interest was shown in what the accused themselves had to say, convictions being largely based on the witness statements.

The judges' actions did not resolve local tensions, leaving the area more divided and unstable than before, while accusations of witchcraft continued.

Now, however, they were returned to the normal ponderous legal processes, and regional leaders were growing weary and withdrawing from popular fears. The hunt accordingly petered out during the 1610s, though a trickle of trials continued until 1618.

The enduring historical outcome of the French Basque witchcraft panic remains De Lancre's book. Machielsen's excellent and vividly written study does not make the judge a sympathetic character – he remains credulous, prurient and bloodthirsty – but it does transform him from the Big Bad of the story into one actor among many in a complex local series of interactions which combined to produce a tragedy.

Ronald Hutton

★★★★★

Urban myths: alive and well

David Clarke enjoys a wide-ranging and entertaining selection of modern folk tales which should become a standard reference work for scholars

The Watkins Book of Urban Legends

Gail de Vos

Watkins Media 2024

Hb, 400pp, £16.99, ISBN 9781786788559

A 2019 letter published by the *Guardian*'s Notes & Queries asked what had become of "urban myths – alligators in the sewers etc – that used to be very popular". Ironically, this question appeared alongside a feature examining popular conspiracy beliefs such as the faked Moon landings. Urban myths are also known as FOAF-tales, as they are often told by a friend of a friend, but legend scholars such as Gail de Vos prefer to call them contemporary legends, or urban legends as in the title of this book.

A leading light in the International Society for Contemporary Legend Research (ISCLR), de Vos has compiled around 200 of the best-known stories "for your reading and telling pleasure".

Her selection is wide ranging both in time and space, with an emphasis upon her Canadian homeland, where she first heard versions of classic stories such as The Hook and Bloody Mary as a youngster.

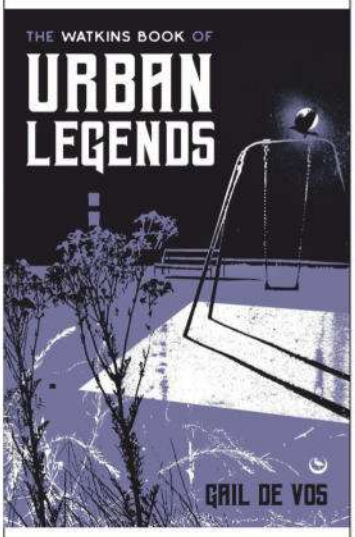
Some are gruesomely entertaining, such as the story about the "Spider in the Hairdo" that was popular during the 1960s when beehive hairdos were *de rigueur*.

As she grew older their mixture of fright, hilarity, shock and surprise began to shape her work as a professional storyteller. She also noticed how memorable they are and how adaptable, migrating from oral traditions to email and now social media interactions, as in the case of the so-called cursed prints of The Crying Boy.

This absorbing collection demonstrates how, far from disappearing, urban legends are all around us embedded in jokes, adverts, rumours and news stories. Indeed, as readers of FT's Strange Days will appreciate, legends *are* news. A quick search online will turn up millions of references to both ancient and modern legends, from big cats to hitch-hiking ghosts, and more recently, Internet memes such as Slenderman and the Momo Challenge.

These stories are not particularly "urban" as many take place in rural settings. Neither are they "myths" in the sense of how this word is used frequently in media (and conversation) to describe a story that is, by definition, false or invented.

As de Vos points out, many have some factual basis, as in the case of a legend about the first digital



camera developed by a young engineer working for Kodak during the 1970s.

According to the legend, his bright idea was never marketed to avoid impacting upon the profits from the company's film processing business. While this sounds like a version of the even older "everlasting light bulb" legend, fact-checking website Snopes.com found it is partly true, in that an engineer working for Kodak *did* invent and received a patent for a portable, digital camera in 1978. But development of this new technology was not stopped because of the potential damage to their film business; it was shelved as it needed more development. But why let the facts get in the way of a good story?

As other examples in this book demonstrate, as in more ancient folklore, urban legends contain cautionary warnings about the dangers of new technology and the dangers of behaviour that violates moral or social values.

As they are so mutable, urban legends constantly evolve to accommodate changes in how we communicate our fears and anxieties. Traditional stories are updated to produce new variants, as in the story of the ghost of Kyiv that emerged from the Russian invasion of Ukraine. This legend updates the theme of superhero protection that can be compared with the Angels of Mons.

This book provides us with a satisfying and long overdue reassessment of the "classic" urban legends, 15 of which de Vos heard in childhood.

Other chapters examine stories currently circulating in pop culture, both orally and on social media, and draw upon the author's own research into legends about breast cancer and musical traditions such as the Devil at the Crossroads that have been the subject of her ISCLR conference papers.

The book arranges legends thematically with chapters on health and wellness, those embedded in conspiracy theories, monsters and cryptids plus the ubiquitous stories concerning ghosts and the supernatural.

Three chapters are devoted to ghost lore and one of these examines the growth in supernatural tourism and "legend tripping", that captures the current vogue for ghost walks and the commercial development of the desire to visit allegedly haunted sites.

This book should become a standard reference work for all urban legend scholars and a key source for anyone interested in tracing the origins of stories told by "friends of a friend".

★★★★★

One Big Box of 'Paranormal Tricks'?

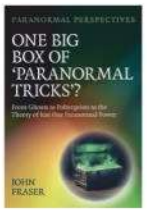
From Ghosts to Poltergeists to the Theory of Just One Paranormal Power

John Fraser

6th Books 2024

Pb, 152pp, £9.99, ISBN 9781083415246

This slim volume is part autobiography and part insight into the author's theories regarding paranormal phenomena. John Fraser has an impressive pedigree in the world of ghost hunting and is a



council member for the SPR as well as a member of the Ghost Club. He knows many of the leading people in this area of study and has attended many ghost hunting field trips.

In this book, he weighs up many theories and arguments and raises some pertinent questions. For example, he asks: can ghost hunting be a science when too often what we are hunting are myths? Are apparitions just residual energy from poltergeist phenomena? And also can people's attitudes cause distinct types of ghosts?

New theories on the paranormal are always welcome and indeed necessary. If I understand Fraser's reasoning correctly, paranormal events from ghosts to poltergeists to UFOs all stem from the same cause – something found within us all. However, he does point out additional links to water in numerous cases of paranormal events as well as incidences of stress and worry.

Overall, I confess I did not understand Fraser's theory, which might well be a failing on my part. Perhaps he can revisit this in future and make his arguments clearer? He does ask the question later in the book: "Can one person's personal reflections on a complex subject, that has been fascinating people for years, possibly hope to achieve in some way an overall theory?" Unfortunately, in this case I don't think he has succeeded. Nonetheless, if you are looking for a take on the life of a ghost hunter and his experiences, peppered with thoughts on the paranormal – this might be of interest.

Sue Hardiman

★★

SCIENCE FICTION AND FANTASY

DAVID V BARRETT **ROUNDS UP THE LATEST TITLES FROM THE WORLD OF SPECULATIVE AND FANTASTIC FICTION**

The Great When

Alan Moore

Bloomsbury 2024

Hb, 336pp, £20, ISBN 9781526643223

Two very different views of an alternative London, from two very well-known authors. Alan Moore's *The Great When*, the first of a trilogy, is set in a 1949 London barely beginning to recover from the War. A socially inept young lad, Dennis Knuckleyard, who works in the grottiest secondhand bookshop imaginable, buys in some early editions of Arthur Machen books – and accidentally buys a book which was never published in our world. If he can't get it back to the Other London where it came from he could be physically turned inside out. Dennis is helped into the Other London by the artist Austin Osman Spare, who of course straddles all worlds; at one point they're in a pub with occultists Kenneth and Steffi Grant: "The table was divided between those lucky enough to have once known Aleister Crowley and those lucky enough not to have done". The Other London recognisably overlays ours, but is surreal: buildings are changed and distorted, some blending with animals and insects, while some of the Other London's denizens are centuries old and others are effectively deities. A fascinating creation.

Step Into the Moonlight Market

Joanne Harris

Gollancz 2024

Hb, 288pp, £22, ISBN 9781399604741

Joanne Harris's *Step Into the Moonlight Market* is a fairytale – beautifully written and as scary as hell. Long ago and far away the Moth King and the Butterfly Queen fell in love and then into hate; to escape their endless fighting their young son followed the webs of the Spider Mage into the World of the Sightless Ones – our world – where his parents, and their Courts, followed in search of him, and in battle with each other. In London, Tom Argent runs a small photography shop; he meets an apparently homeless man who gives his name as Spider; and then a stunning young woman walks into his shop and he falls instantly in love... But it's when Tom sees a poster for the Moonlight Market by Old London Bridge, that his life changes irrevocably: he meets the Midnight Folk and the Daylight Folk, and becomes caught up in their endless conflict. Wonderful.

Stage Magic: 4 Plays and a Screenplay

Diana Wynne Jones

Moondust Books 2024

Pb, 351pp, £12.99, ISBN 9780954749835

Another well-known author, now sadly no longer with us: before Diana Wynne Jones started writing her YA novels that are equally loved by adults, she wrote several stage plays and a screenplay for BBC children's TV; that one wasn't made, but three of the four fantasy plays in this book were performed in the early days of the Unicorn Theatre for Children, based at the Arts Theatre in Covent Garden, London, from 1967 to 1999. *Stage Magic* is a treat for DWJ fans; the plots are basically children's farces, but they twinkle with her humour and shine with her sense of fairness and deep dislike of injustice.

Dirt Upon my Skin

Steve Toase

Black Shuck Books 2024

Pb, 180pp, £5.99, ISBN 9781917173995

Regular FT writer Steve Toase is a trained archæologist. *Dirt Upon my Skin* is a small but brilliant collection of short stories where archæology meets horror, in some cases, or the world of faerie – or just the weird. Two are written in the form of a site diary and a more formal site report from digs. Some are about disturbing finds; several are about disturbing something that really shouldn't be disturbed. Altogether, some fascinating, scary and often haunting stories.

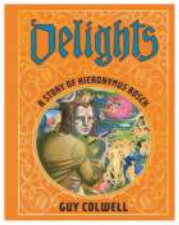
Powsels and Thrums

Alan Garner

4th Estate 2024

Hb, 229pp, £14.99, ISBN 9780008725211

Powsels and thrums were the bits and pieces of cloth left over when self-employed handloom weavers like Alan Garner's several-great-grandfathers sold their cloth to market; the weaver would then take these snippets and make something new from them. "As with weaving, so with writing," says Garner. *Powsels and Thrums* contains some of the snippets that came together to inspire his novels. "They are fragments to show how creativity makes connections between entities in ways that have not been seen to connect before." There are reminiscences about his growing up in his beloved Cheshire and the tales his grandfather told him as they walked the hills. "By the time I was 18 I had learnt an important rule of research: Pursue the Anomaly. If something does not make sense, what is it saying?" Garner has little time for those academics and critics who have "abjured poetry and imagination"; he sees them as "the totalitarians of literacy". Those who insist that they "know", he writes, "shut down creativity ... Fundamentalists do not question. They have stopped." In contrast, he says: "Art makes people feel."



Delights: A Story of Hieronymous Bosch

Syd Moore

Fantagraphics Books 2024

Hb, 162pp, £29.99, ISBN 978-1683969525

Finally, two graphic novels about two very different artists. Hieronymous Bosch is perhaps the ultimate fortean artist. In *Delights: A Story of Hieronymous Bosch*, Guy Colwell tells a completely fictional account of how his weird and wonderful masterpiece *The Garden of Earthly Delights* might have come about. He calls Bosch by the name he would have been known by, Jheronimus (Jeroen for short) van Aken (his family originally came from Aachen, before moving to 's-Hertogenbosch). He moves the actual Inquisitorial investigation of the painting back 100 years, to when Bosch was painting it, which gives him the opportunity to explain it to its critics. And he has the people who commissioned the painting, probably Duke Engelbrecht and his teenage nephew and heir, Hendrik, constantly demanding that Bosch add more and more erotic figures and scenes – which Bosch justifies as a look into "the hidden heart and mystery of humanity's yearning for joy and longing for a happy world full of innocent delight". A truly delightful book, with a fold-out colour reproduction of *The Garden of Earthly Delights* inside the back cover.

Caravaggio: The Palette and the Sword

Milo Manara

Fantagraphics Books 2024

Pb, 76pp, £19.99, ISBN 9781683969860

While obviously fictionalised, *Caravaggio: The Palette and the Sword* is far closer to a factual biography, following the early career and exploits of the young Michelangelo Merisi from his arrival in Rome in 1592. (Caravaggio was the town near Milan where his family came from.) It's meticulously historically researched and exquisitely executed by Italian graphic artist Milo Manara. While not specifically fortean, I'm including it partly because it's a gorgeous work of art in itself, and partly because of the startling contrast between Caravaggio's astonishing art and his bad-boy character. He can hardly walk down a street without getting into a brawl, and the book (part one of two) ends in 1606 with him killing a gangster he had particularly bad blood with, whose whore had modelled for Caravaggio as the Virgin Mary. Rarely for a graphic novel, it includes story notes, a bibliography, a two-page essay by an art historian – and reproductions of no fewer than 27 works by Caravaggio, many of which we'd watched the artist painting in the story. A joy!

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If walls could talk

At last, a Blu-ray release for Nigel Kneale's highly fortean 1972 television play *The Stone Tape* – and it comes stuffed with compelling commentaries, documentaries and essays

The Stone Tape

Dir Peter Sasdy, UK 1972
101 Films, £24.99 (Ltd Edition Blu-ray)

We're all familiar with the Stone Tape Theory: that places, particularly buildings, can absorb impressions of usually traumatic events and play them back centuries later, accounting for the feeling of unease we have in some old buildings, and sometimes in visual or auditory form – one of the most pleasing explanations for ghosts. The idea's been around for nearly two centuries – Charles Babbage suggested that our words stay in the air for years after we've spoken them; the early SPR explored the idea of "place memory" to explain ghosts, and in 1961 parapsychologist TC Lethbridge popularised a similar notion. Whatever its validity, it's now firmly named after Nigel Kneale's iconic 1972 TV drama.

A team of scientists moves into a 19th-century mansion to work on developing new recording media. It's led by the arrogant and abrasive Peter Brock (Michael Bryant) who is cheating on his wife with computer programmer Jill Greeley (Jane Asher). In one room, centuries older than the rest of the building, Jill hears footsteps then sees a young woman in a maid's uniform at the top of some stone steps and hears her scream in terror. Brock suggests: "The room holds an image… It must act like a recording, fixed in the floor and the walls." The stereotypical belligerent alpha male, he fills the room with technical equipment and blasts it with sound – and Jill realises the screaming maid has gone; he's "wiped the tape". But he's only erased the surface layer, allowing much older and more terrifying impressions to come through…

The sound effects are a triumph of the Radiophonic Workshop

The incredibly powerful sound effects which make the play so effective are a triumph of the BBC Radiophonic Workshop.

The Stone Tape has been on DVD for years, but this is its first time on Blu-ray. Extras include two commentaries, one of them a conversation between Nigel Kneale and film critic Kim Newman, and an interesting overview of Kneale's work. There's also an excellent documentary in which Jane Asher describes the misogynist attitudes in the workplace in the 1970s. Stephen Volk, creator of *Ghostwatch*, observes: "One of Nigel Kneale's abiding themes was the clash between technology, scientific thinking or rational thinking and the supernatural or instinctive thinking, or the Dionysian versus the Apollonian side of human nature…"And Mark Gatiss says: "I've read vague things over the years in *Fortean Times* about a pub in Cornwall which had a very high mineral content in the rock, and people said they could hear things… Someone said: 'The walls might have absorbed hundreds of years of people being there.'"

There's also a booklet with two essays, one by Andy Murray, Kneale's biographer, who points out the delightful detail that Horsely Towers, the mansion used for the exteriors of The Stone Tape, was the home of Ada Lovelace, the young woman who wrote the programming for effectively the first computer, Babbage's Analytical Engine.

David V Barrett

★★★★☆

The Damned

Dir Thordur Palsson, UK/US/Ireland/Iceland 2024
On general release

This is an excellent slice of Icelandic mythology which benefits from beautiful photography, a gripping story and a commanding central performance.

In the 19th century, Eva (Odessa Young) runs a remote Icelandic fishing station, having taken on the role after her husband's death. Life is hard and, after a barren spell, food is short. One day Eva sees a vessel foundering on the rocks in the bay, but following the advice of her fishermen declines to aid them. Later, a supply crate washes up on shore and she insists that the men row out to salvage supplies from the wreck. To their horror they find there are survivors, who in desperation try to climb into the boat. The crew shove them back into the water to die. There is immense guilt over what they have done but, for a while, the fishermen's luck changes for the better and a big catch raises their spirits; but Eva is warned by Helga (an unrecognisable Siobhan Finneran) that the spirits of the dead sailors – *draugr* – will not rest until they have destroyed those who failed to save them.

All good meaty stuff, and superbly backed up by the æsthetic. The interiors are dark, smoky and claustrophobic, but wonderfully lit, rendering almost every image a window into a forgotten world. However, there is also a sense of isolation generated by the vast exteriors. There is a strong survival element in the film, and it is depicted well.

The mythology is intriguing. I'd only previously encountered *draugr* in the classic videogame *Skyrim*. This film draws on folk tales to give the *draugr* a lore of their own, how they can hurt you and how they can be destroyed, in the same way that vampires have their own characteristics.

Odessa Young is great as Eva – simultaneously an authoritative leader figure whom the men respect and a vulnerable woman who slowly realises what is happening. The men have less to do, but they are fine in their supporting roles. Despite the use of Icelandic mythology, the film is not really particularly original; but I have no hesitation in recommending *The Damned*.

Daniel King

★★★★☆

TELEVISION

FT's resident couch potatoes, STU NEVILLE & RUTH MORRIS eye up the small screen's fortean offerings

In the mid-1980s, stalwart US broadcaster NBC aired a pilot-series that focused on cold cases of both true crime and mysterious events, but with the emphasis distinctly on the former. To underline this, the first run of *Unsolved Mysteries* featured six episodes with three hosts in rotation, each an actor renowned for their portrayal of a no-nonsense, insightful detective: Raymond Burr (*Ironside*), Karl Malden (*Streets of San Fransisco*) and Robert Stack (*The Untouchables*). Each brought a sense of gravitas and balance to the proceedings, and while Burr and Malden both departed from their screen image (Burr ambulatory and Malden without his hat), Stack retained his Eliot Ness trench coat and became the permanent host. The series ran for 15 years and had a three-year revival in 2007.

TV juggernaut Netflix fully resuscitated the series in 2020 sans a host and with a greater emphasis on the mysterious. The latest season revisits mysteries that were covered by the original series and continue to baffle. This continuity allows it to build upon its own narrative.

"The granddaddy of all UFO incidents", Roswell, has dominated the field for the last 75 years. Although there has been persistent coverage of the incident, much of the discussion has been extremely circular in nature with the same basic narrative and key points endlessly recycled. Now, 30 years after its first examination of the incident, the programme revisits the

The latest season revisits mysteries covered by the original series

saga, promising to attempt some closure. To help unravel the increasingly tangled threads, Donald Schmidt and Kevin Randall, the two greatest authorities upon the subject still living, have been brought together. The episode starts with a brief resumé of the incident, from the moment Brazel found the wreckage to it being taken to the Fort Worth base. Much of the firsthand testimony comes from the earlier series which, given the passage of time, is invaluable, as so many of the original participants have long since passed away. In addition, they reveal that since the initial Roswell episode of *Unsolved Mysteries*, a further 600 witnesses came forward who they have subsequently interviewed.

Unsolved Mysteries uses old sci fi footage, but does so in an intelligent and cogent manner as a useful piece of cultural contextualisation. A particularly endearing aspect of the 2024 *Unsolved Mysteries* is that it can use its own material from 1989 and build upon it; which also serves to remind us that one of the issues even back then was dealing with testimonies about events in 1947 from people already advanced in years. The compelling evidence presented by the witnesses, mostly now the offspring of the people involved in Roswell, makes it hard to believe that what they are discussing is anything other than authentic.

The show has also curated clips from the major US news channels of the time, including interviews with various people about their opinions of the incident, such as the Larry King and Stephen Schiff interview.

Given the passage of time, it was always unlikely that definitive answers or new evidence would come to light. Roswell now has its own momentum, but what is demonstrated by the wealth of eyewitness testimony, the documentation provided with sworn affidavits, the video depositions, the deathbed confessions, is that *something* happened… something that the Airforce felt it needed to cover up and continues to do so to this day, nearly 80 years later.

Another mystery revisited is cattle mutilations, first observed post-WWII and seeming to peak in the early 1990s. However, this baffling and gruesome phenomenon continues to the present day, with a particular concentration in the Pacific Northwest. There is some startling footage and eyewitness testimony from cattle ranchers and county sheriffs, all clearly grounded, serious people, giving a sociological context to this mystery as their livelihoods are directly impacted. The shocking footage includes carcasses of cattle that have been drained of blood and had organs removed with surgical precision and the extraordinary sight of a cow seemingly lying normally in the pasture, which is in fact entirely bloodless and in full rigor mortis. An attendant vet remarks that this is totally impossible, yet here we are. An unsettling but deeply involving episode.

Other revisits include Mothman, featuring a recent interview with witness Linda Scarberry, whose story and apparent sincerity have not altered in 60 years. This is another episode that is informative, economical and engaging, giving both a full account for people new to the saga and a useful update for those familiar with it.

Not all of the mysteries are revisits. Even *Unsolved Mysteries* cannot escape the blackhole gravity of paranormal investigation documentaries. Cue 'My Paranormal Partner'. Within a minute of the credits, we are introduced to 'More-than-a-spirit-guide' Becky, who spiritually accompanies Don Phillips, who deals with the "worst of the worst" hauntings. Off we head to a family home in Leicester where Gaynor Issitt nonchalantly states that there are lots of dark things happening, including curtains catching fire. Gaynor has a way with understatement; apparently being pushed down the stairs just got "a little too much". Don assures us that: "This is not a normal occurrence in a normal house." (Thanks, Don.) Making a dapper entrance is founder of the Scientific Establishment of Parapsychology, Steve Mera. Steve and his sidekick Jackie take Don and his sidekick Becky, on a road trip to test Don's mettle. Cue night vision, people tripping over tree stumps in the dark, fun with bat detectors and a competition to see how many times the word 'portal' can be used. We'd written this episode off as yet another unsatisfying delve into psychic investigations; but then a trip to Ireland sees Don and Steve meeting Barry Fitzgerald to uncover a genuinely intriguing case that restores faith in the integrity of *Unsolved Mysteries* and leaves the viewer with a genuine sense of wonder. Recommended.

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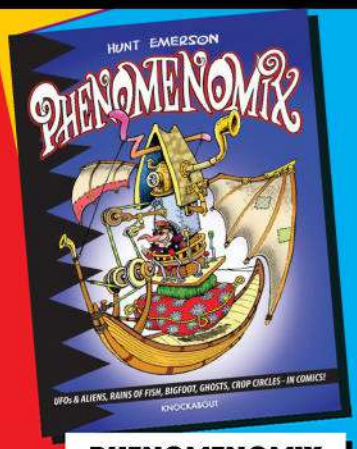

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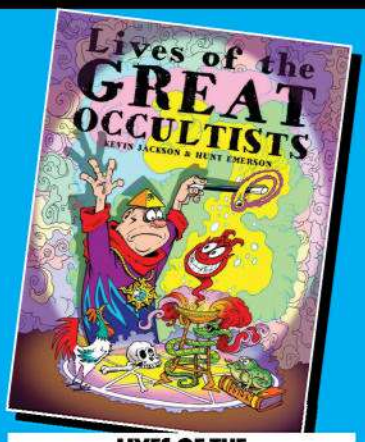

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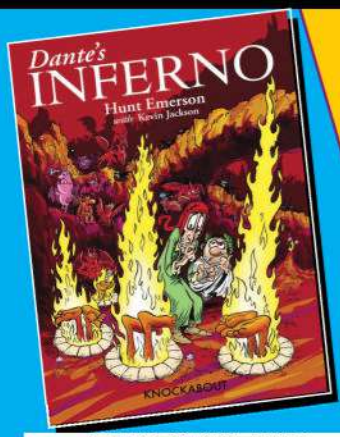

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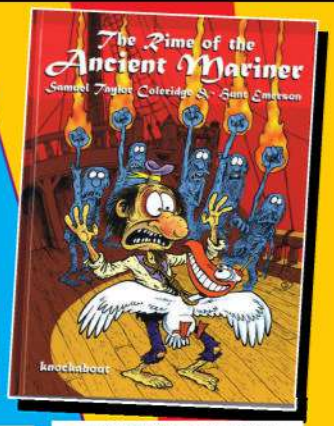

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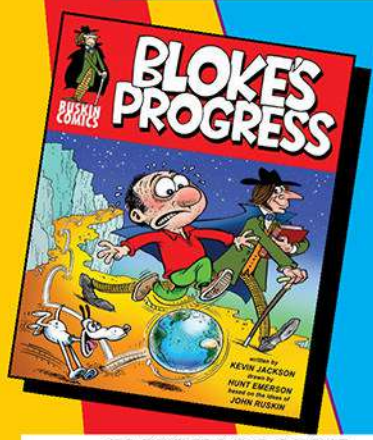

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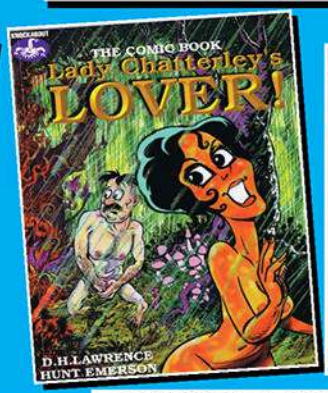
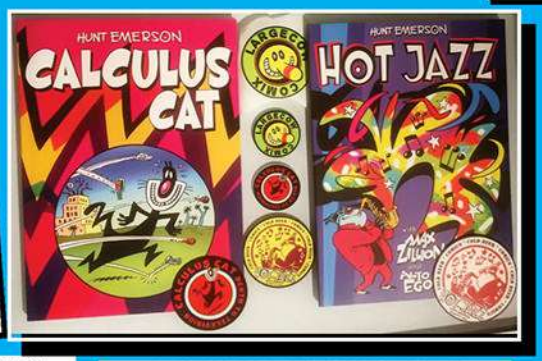


LADY CHATTERLEY'S LOVER!

My somewhat bowdlerized version of the novel by DH Lawrence. Bawdy, robust and bizarre - yes, it's Adults Only. ***£8.00***



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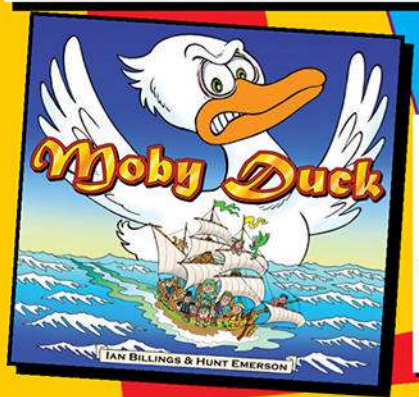

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Monkey puzzle trees

I was astonished to read in Viv Hobbs's letter [**FT451:65**] that South Wales pit manager's houses all had monkey puzzle trees in their front gardens. My grandfather James Starkey was the Deputy (Manager) at Amington Pit in the 1910s–1920s in the Staffordshire coalfield (100 miles from the Rhondda), and in his front garden at 8 The Green, Amington, was – and is still – a monkey puzzle tree. The house is even called 'Fir Tree House' (a yokel's mis-identification). This exotic tree looks completely anomalous in what was a basic pit village – can this really be an extraordinary coincidence? It would be important for the Pit Deputy's house to be instantly recognisable to go to in case of an accident – perhaps actually the apparently separate mines were all owned by a conglomerate who did a mass deal on monkey puzzle trees?

One wonders if other companies identified their employees in a similar way with other things?

Roger J Morgan
London

Ancient Engineering

There is a glaring omission in Geoff Clifton's letter about pyramids [**FT451:63**]. One reason Khufu's pyramid could have been finished as a tomb many years after his death is because he was mummified. He might have been kept anywhere dry until the pyramid was ready for him. Also, as Tutankhamen's tomb showed, if the pharaoh died unexpectedly, he could be put in someone else's reused tomb. Despite being immortalised, it appears the pharaoh could quickly be consigned to the past. Perhaps Khufu's tomb had been intended for a predecessor?

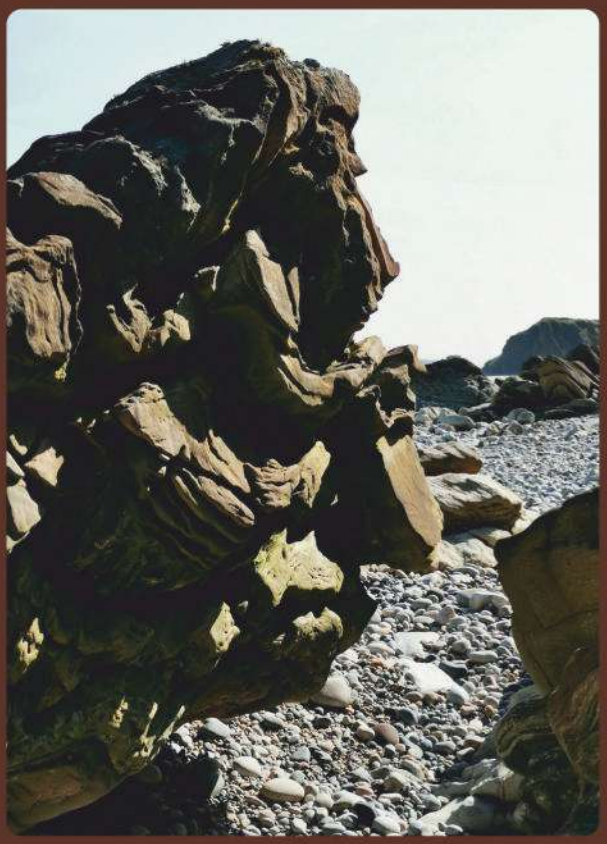
Georgina Skipper
Wyke Regis, Dorset

Leopard seal?

Having just read 'A Dicynodont Depiction?' in Alien Zoo [**FT451:20**], I couldn't help but think that people sometimes overthink things. The first thing that came to mind, when I saw the image, was that it was a stylised image of a leopard seal with a fish or other morsel in its mouth. A quick check and I find that they do travel to the vicinity, albeit rarely, but wouldn't this make a newsworthy report for cave art?

Grover Wright
By email

SIMULACRA CORNER



This stone head is on Doagh Island, Inishowen, Donegal, Ireland, and was sent in by Dave Johnson.

We are always glad to receive pictures of spontaneous forms and figures, or any curious images. Send them (with your postal address) to Fortean Times, PO Box 1200, Whitstable CT1 9RH or to sieveking@forteantimes.com

Silver nitrate

To expand on an earlier spontaneous human combustion theme, nitrate film is often said to 'spontaneously combust' – but this is just a case when people being dramatic have entered linguistics. Nitrate film is volatile, sure, but not magical. Check out the documentary *Dawson City: Frozen Time* for instances of this usage.

James Wright
Westcliff-on-Sea, Essex

The first Greys

Currently, the thought seems to be that the first space alien greys appeared in "The Bellero Shield" episode of *The Outer Limits* on 10 February 1964. This detail is recorded in *Fortean Times* and in *The Abduction of Betty and Barney Hill* (page 220). I have found an earlier appearance.

In chapter 12 of *The Wonderful Flight to the Mushroom Planet* by Eleanor Cameron, David and Chuck get out of their spaceship (read the book, but the whole series is fun) and are greeted by two persons "not quite as tall as he [David] and Chuck." "Their heads were large and domelike, and their faces were smaller and pale, almost gray. Their eyes were huge, great round brown staring eyes – gentle, frightened eyes like a tarsier's..." This was published in 1954. There were illustrations (in the first editions) which depicted creatures much like the greys we see today. The book was popular young-adult fiction in the USA into the 1960s. The Hills may never have read the book, but they are quite likely to have known children who did read it.

As an aside, the people on the mushroom planet are normally green. In *The Encyclopedia of Monsters* by Daniel Cohen, "the best early story" of little green men was from 14 August 1947. An Italian artist on a solo hiking expedition met them in the mountains between Italy and Yugoslavia. The three-foot green-skin midgets zapped him with an electric shock and left with his geologist's pick. Did Eleanor Cameron read about this encounter?

Michael Holt
By email

The Box of Delights

Oh dear, that brought it all flooding back, those childhood Christmases now almost completely embodied by 'The Box of Delights' [**FT452:38-41**]. I was 10, and miserable at school, but like some of the 'Boxers' would rush home to be willingly absorbed! An added bonus was that my father, a man who thought most kids' TV banal and pointless, was a huge fan of John Masefield, and I have fond memories of the two of us enjoying it together. The theme tune still dampens my eye to this day. A wonderful series.

Arthur Burton
Maidstone, Kent

LETTERS

Ghosthunting gadgets

I read the article on the use of electronic gadgets while ghost hunting [**FT451:14**] with interest. Around 35 years ago I gave this a try; in my case I had to import an analogue TriField meter from the USA, because they were not available in this country at that time. Initially, I used it to no great effect, because the meter would react to any and all electrical fields, whether generated by TV sets or electrical wiring, or who knows, even a ghostly presence.

However, the only time that it did react to something definite was during an investigation that we conducted in the Covenanters Prison in Greyfriars Churchyard in Edinburgh, while investigating claims regarding the notorious 'McKenzie Poltergeist', which supposedly attacked visitors to this location during the regular 'ghost tours'. On this occasion I had taken a rather sensitive medium with me to help with the investigation and while I was with the medium at the bottom end of the 'prison', I happened to lay the TriField on a low wall. Suddenly the medium said, "Someone just walked past us", and as she said this I glanced at the meter and it shot to full scale then dropped back to zero. This was an interesting development. Then the medium said, "Someone else has just walked past us", and, once again, the meter went to full scale and dropped back to zero and this time the medium also saw the deflection. These cannot have been random events, so either the two spikes of electromagnetic energy that appeared which the TriField detected and the medium had interpreted as a 'spirit' were produced by the 'spirit', or some external source had produced them. Either way, it happened twice in quick succession and the medium had sensed them, as did the TriField. So even now I am puzzled by what happened, because other than that, the meter did not react at all during this and a subsequent visit.

I still have the meter, but I have to say that the majority of ghosthunters who use assorted gadgets, especially the point-and-shoot variety of laser thermometers, don't have much of a clue as to how they work, because these thermometers only measure the surface the laser is pointing at, and not the ambient temperature.

Brian Allan
By email

Editor's note: Brian Allan is an established speaker and author of many fortean books.

Grey Ladies

I was fascinated to read Rebecca Batley's excellent *Legends of the Grey Lady* (**FT450:36-40**), as I had received two first-hand accounts of grey ladies, one of which Ms Batley recounted in her article. In 2011, I was writing a book about film star Eric Portman, who was born in the same town as me (Halifax), and I appealed for information from local people, through a letter in my local newspaper, the *Halifax Courier*.

Mrs Florence Dunn replied to my appeal (she had been in the actor's fan club), but when she learned I was also a fortean researcher, she sent me an article she had written for the journal *Nursing Times* (date/issue unknown) about her own brush with the Grey Lady of the Cambridge Military Hospital in Aldershot, and she answered my questions about her experience. I included this account in my book *Ghosts* (4ward Books, 2021, pp. 100-102)

Florence Dunn has worked as a nurse, on and off, since the age of 19, and has had many odd experiences, but none of which left an indelible mark on her – except her meeting with a grey lady.

She writes: "I was 20 years old and joined the army to train to be a nurse. I was a WRAC nursing orderly until Queen Alexandra's Imperial Nursing Sisters became the Queen Alexandra's Royal Army Nursing Corps. I was among the first new recruits to 'go over.'

"Our grey lady was a sister in the 1914-1918 war and, it was said, inadvertently and tragically caused the death of a soldier. The incident happened on Ward 18 at the Cambridge Military Hospital, Aldershot (Hampshire) and during the time I was there – between 1949 and 1951 – Ward 18 was never used. The beds were 'barracked back' and stood empty.

"You can imagine my surprise when, one early morning from my kitchen window on Ward 16, I saw the lights of Ward 18 go on! I checked the patients on Ward 16 and the side ward, and all was quiet. I walked along the corridor to Ward 18 and, as I approached, I saw the doors were closed and the chains through the handles were intact and padlocked.

"I stood on my toes to look through the 'port-hole' windows and saw the lights go out, a set at a time, as if someone had switched them off. The light switches were inside the inner doors, as they were on all Nightingale-style wards. As I stood there, the door swung very, very slightly and a faint scented air moved by me.

"I returned to my own ward and went into the side ward where an elderly Queen Alexandra sister lay awake. 'You look as if you've seen a ghost,' she said. I explained, as best as I could, what had happened. The sister reassured me, adding: 'Sister Agatha would never hurt you.'

"This was my first experience of our resident ghost, though she was seen quite often in the corridor, on the ground floor, and going up the

Scouting for forteans?

Facing the bus station, the Bridlington Shopping Centre – The Promenades – has several panels designed and created by the local scout group. It brightens up an otherwise boring red brick wall. These panels feature local tourist spots, landmarks and activities of the scouting organisation. The first time I'd sat, waiting for a bus, I'd noticed one... interesting panel.

At the centre of the panel is a couple comfortable in a tent, appearing warm and safe. However when you look at it more you see: bear tracks, the Gruffallo, a mysterious cave with coloured paths from it, a weirdly humanoid wolf, two glowing eyes staring from a bole in a tree, a little grey bug-eyed being, a Nessie-style river snake... and next to the tent – Slenderman!

I moved into the area six months ago without knowing what the Scouting movement apparently are aware of; that Bridlington is a hotbed of fortean activity!

Alan Cassady-Bishop
Bridlington, Yorkshire

Iridescent Clouds

I noticed mention of iridescent clouds seen early in December in Italy [**FT442:22**]. On Christmas Eve morning 2023 about 9.35am I was walking down the valley where I live in Gateshead, Tyne & Wear, by the river Derwent and noticed these clouds, a form of rainbow I'd never seen before.

Dean Teasdale, *Gateshead, Tyne & Wear*

steps towards Wards 16 and 18.

"Ward 7 was an acute surgical ward, mostly used for young men undergoing appendectomy and hernia operations, and it was there that a young soldier awoke in the early hours and was surprised to see a sister standing nearby. She asked if he was awake and told him to go to the ward kitchen for a cup of tea and then back to bed.

"The lad did as he was told, but the male night nurse was annoyed and asked him about the sister. After the patient had gone back to bed, the nurse rang the night sister. No one had been on the ward at that time in the early morning.

"Making her usual round the next morning, the night sister checked the lad's story and asked him about the nurse he had seen. He described her outfit in detail, and it corresponded to that worn by a World War I Queen Alexandra ward sister!"

Writing in 2012, Florence told me: "I returned to Aldershot just over two years ago and was sad to see the old Cambridge Military Hospital standing empty. In the security office, chatting with the guards, I raised the subject of the 'grey lady'. One of them told me that she was still there, but strangely, only the top half of her was now seen.

"He admitted he dare not to go inside the building alone but had been in with another guard. Although they had not seen the grey lady, they had noticed an unfamiliar scent in the corridor.

"I should like a service to be held at the hospital so that Sister Agatha could end her earthly wanderings and go in peace to her maker. I hear that there are plans to demolish the wings, leaving only the centre block standing, and I hate to think of her wandering about alone and afraid."

● Another first-hand account of a grey lady sighting appeared in my book *Haunted Dorset* (SB Publications, 2004, p.26; co-written with Chris Ellis), and it came from Mrs Marie Meter after a similar media appeal. (I misspelt 'Meter' as 'Metu' in the book, as I misinterpreted the lady's handwriting!)

In the book, I wrote: "Now in her Seventies, Mrs Marie [Meter] of Weymouth, still remembers when she witnessed the Gipsy Lane ghost, (in Bridport, Dorset), one sunny day in September 1934."

She wrote: "At the time, I lived with my family in South Street, Bridport. Myself, my sister and a friend, with my baby brother in a pushchair, were knocking down conkers at Gipsy Lane, off Pymore Road. At that time, there were no houses there; just a few trees and a dirt track.

"Suddenly, a lady of about 60 years old appeared from nowhere. She wore an Edwardian dress, veiled hat, shoes, stockings, and carried an umbrella – all entirely grey – even her face was grey! The lady reached her arms out to us and smiled – a particularly sickly smile, I remember – but we were all so scared we just ran like hell!

"My sister got hold of the pushchair with my brother in it, my friend grabbed her bike, and we ran all the way to the Salvation Hall on Priory Lane, where our parents were attending a meeting. When we told them what had happened, my Dad said we had seen the Grey Lady, who had been seen by other local people before.

"My friend, who lived in a village nearby, and who often passed down Gipsy Lane, always took the long way round, twice as far, flatly refusing to return to that spot.

"I have since heard of other people seeing the Grey Lady and my sister knows someone who has personally witnessed her. "The four of us still talk about it now, even though I was only seven years old at the time – nearly seventy years ago!"

Andy Owens
Halifax, West Yorkshire

Howard Hughes

The television review article of "The King of UFOs" states that the programme is "narrated by Howard Hughes, presumably not the dead one..." [**FT452:61**]. Well sorry to say, Howard Hughes of radio and "The Unexplained" podcast fame did indeed pass away unexpectedly in November. So unfortunately this article has become a victim of unforeseen events and now reads a little distastefully.

Paul "Tiny" Jackson
By email

Deals with the Devil

Brian McTaggart [**FT452:63**] suggested an interesting point of ineffable legality *in re* the contract between Satan and a willing person (a legal entity in their own right) for various material services supplied by said Fallen Angel. This brings to mind the actual debate concerning the ownership of the Apple of Knowledge and Eve (*Vide* Almighty vs Germaine Greer) but that is *sub judice.*

McTaggart's suggestion is that "The 'simple act' of going to Satan for a deal is a rejection of God and your soul is already forfeit so you will get nothing […]"

It must be brought to attention that while The Almighty™ has taken a hands-off point of view concerning the actions and motives of humans (the "Free Will Policy"), Satan has decided to make a more direct approach to recruitment. *Continued on p.64*

"Is it urgent?"

It Happened to Me...

Readers write in with their own accounts of strange phenomena

Phantom Vehicles

I sleep at the front of the house in a quiet residential road in Dorchester. One morning a year or so ago, while lying in bed, I heard a large creaky vehicle approaching, that sounded like an ancient farm lorry. It rattled to a halt right outside, the engine was switched off and brake applied. No one emerged, no one approached, no voices – just total silence. After a while I arose and peered out, but saw only the few private cars already parked. There was nobody about.

The following morning the same thing happened, though this time it sounded like a normal van. Again it drew up outside, again the engine was switched off, followed by silence with no hint of activity. This occurred several times more, always approaching from the right. I'd think "It's going to pull up here", and sure enough it did. Then it all stopped, and hasn't happened since.

Has anyone else had a similar experience?

Roger Wyld
Dorchester. Dorset

More helpful fairies

I have read letters in *Fortean Times* on the subject of fairies helping find lost things, and I have received their help on previous occasions – and so have a couple of friends.

Two weeks ago, my husband lost his sun hat. He searched all over the house and car, and last night he concluded sadly: "It's gone. I'll have to get a new one."

One week ago, I lost my favourite necklace – a thin gold chain with a sun pendant on it. I felt sure I had put it down somewhere absent-mindedly. I looked for it every day in the places I would usually put it, in the evenings when I take it off. No sign of it anywhere. I was really sad it might be lost forever.

So last night, Friday evening [2 August 2024], I suggested that we need to ask the fairies out loud for help. So we both did. I know that we both felt slightly ridiculous, but we had nothing to lose, did we?

"Fairies of Lost Things, please help me find my hat."

"Fairies of Lost Things, my necklace is missing, please help me find it."

"Fairies of Lost Things, please help me find my necklace"

This morning, Saturday, we woke up and had a bit of a lie in and a coffee. I went downstairs and did a bit of pottering and tidying. I put something on the windowsill in the conservatory. Then I looked down and realised that the hat was there, in front of me. It was on the floor, on top of a discarded cardboard box. It was not hidden. How could we have missed it? I brought it upstairs with a smile. Husband was shocked and grinning from ear to ear – and in some disbelief. I said, "Well, all I need now is my necklace".

Not more than five minutes later, I started to get dressed and opened my underwear drawer. I open this drawer every day to take out clean underwear. I took some as usual, and was about to close the drawer, and there, with a twinkle and a sparkle, was my beautiful chain and pendant.

After we had recovered from the shock – and I can tell you, it involved head to toe goosebumps, picking my chin up off the floor, and wiping away a couple of tears – we thanked the fairies out loud. They are incredible.

Rachel Smith
Lincolnshire

Unsettling guesthouse

In the late 1970s we purchased an Edwardian house with five bedrooms overlooking the river and Looe Bay [in Cornwall], and ran it as a guesthouse. It had an odd atmosphere with a feeling of being watched. It wasn't long before things started to happen. There was a creak on the small stairs leading to the second floor every night at 10.45pm exactly, near to the rooms not occupied at the time. We were careful to avoid that area before retiring.

Sometime later, my wife and I slept in the large front room at the top of the house, with my young daughter in a single bedroom on the floor below. One night a tremendous crash woke us all. My daughter came running into our room quite shaken. Investigating, we found nothing: no sign of a break-in, nothing to account for it. The crash seemed to come from below our room but above my daughter's ceiling. The strange thing is we had experienced the same crash while living in a London bed-sit. It sounded as if a heavy wardrobe had fallen over. Again, there was nothing to account for the sound in the quiet suburb. On questioning our landlady, she informed us that some years previously she had slept in that same room and experienced the same crash!

While cleaning a bedroom for visitors, my wife noticed a smell of tobacco, an old-fashioned pipe tobacco favoured by fishermen years ago. This occurred on several occasions.

During one summer and with all bedrooms full, we slept in the dining room. We had a late meal of steak and I went to the fridge in the kitchen for the jar of mustard, but couldn't find it. My wife then said, "I saw it there earlier, I'll go." But she couldn't find it either.

During that night I was awakened by a woman's voice giggling quite loudly. I got up to investigate and went out into the courtyard at the back of the house, but there was no sign of anybody. I checked the lane behind. All was silent. Very odd. Next morning I was aroused with the pinger on the cooker clanging away. No one had set the warning alarm. I turned it off and went to the fridge for milk for our morning tea, and there at the front of the shelf was the missing mustard!

Peter Cawthorne
Widegates, Cornwall

Was I a ghost?

Around 1976/7 I had what can only be described as an out-of-body experience. At the time I was in quite an emotional place. I had been living in Manchester with my partner and young son and we decided to move to Edinburgh where his parents lived. He went first to organise somewhere for us all to live and I and our son went back to stay temporarily with my parents in North Yorkshire. This was in the days long before mobile phones and the Internet, and as I hadn't heard from my partner for a while I was getting more and more anxious. On this particular night I went to bed as usual, feeling very emotional and confused, but eventually fell asleep. In my 'dream' I went out of the bedroom window and out into the night sky. I remember having a very deep feeling of peace and calm and the feeling of travelling through the sky was unforgettable. There was a gentle warm breeze and stars twinkling above me and lights below. Then I suddenly felt myself dive down and was standing in a bedroom with a bed in it and a man whom I recognised as my partner lying

with his back to me. As I stood watching him he turned over, put his hand out and said my name. That was the end of the 'dream', but the next day my partner phoned to see if I was OK. He said he had woken during the night with a very strong feeling that someone was watching him. He had turned over to see me standing beside the bed; in shock he reached out to me and said my name, but then I had immediately shrunk into a tiny dot and disappeared.

That was an unusual way to get reassurance but it certainly made me think about what ghosts actually are after my experience of apparently being one. When people see the ghosts of monks and nuns for example were these people actually having OBEs whilst meditating or praying intently and going for a walk down the street? Often ghosts are seen when the actual person was in a highly emotional state or even at the point of death, and I wonder if the bedroom I appeared in is now haunted? I'd be very interested in what people think of this.

Heather MacDougall
East Lothian, Scottish Lowlands

Croft Castle voices

On 16 May 2024 Helen (my better half) and I visited the very scenic Croft Castle in Leominster. While exploring the different rooms of the large house (not technically a castle, more an ornate country house), I eventually found myself in a spacious yet sepulchral room on the first floor. I felt compelled to rest for a moment on one of the couches (which was allowed) by the large fireplace.

I was admiring the painting of Sir Herbert Croft on the opposite side of the room (showing him in full WW1 uniform), when a voice to my right (the empty half of the couch) politely asked if I had been in the army.

A fair assumption as I do have short hair (and was carrying a marching compass), but also strangely prescient as I'm currently working my way through US Army Field Manual 3-25.26 as part of my learning up on map reading and navigation. Alas, no more conversation was possible as Helen, curious to see me conversing with an empty couch, came over and sat where the good Sir Herbert was sitting and

"A voice to my right politely asked if I had been in the army"

he faded away…

We exited the room and made our way down the corridor to yet another impressive staircase – on the landing at the top of the stairs. Helen hesitated slightly and seemed startled by something. It was later, outside in the garden, she revealed that as she was about to descend the stairs, a voice had started singing "Happy birthday" in her ear. This in itself is particularly interesting as she heard the voice distinctly in her deaf ear and has never experienced anything like this before. I certainly didn't hear anyone singing "Happy birthday", but would have noticed it if they had, as my birthday had been two days earlier.

We both agreed Croft Castle was a nice place to visit for the scenery and history, but all the more so due to it having such friendly and communicative spirits there!

Gordon Anthony Cave-Wallace
Bearwood, Birmingham, West Midlands

Disturbing dresser

The ancient village of Bierton, near Aylesbury, Buckinghamshire, old enough to be mentioned in the Domesday Book, was a Royalist stronghold during the English Civil War and is the location of the 16th century Red Lion pub, which local legend has it hosted Charles I himself.

Bierton was also the childhood home of my wife. Several years ago during a visit to the area my wife asked if we could call in to the village so that she could show me her childhood home in Great Lane (adjacent to the Red Lion) and see what, if anything, had changed over the years. Whilst walking around the village, also accompanied by our daughter, my wife was recalling tales of her childhood; how the dog escaped into nearby fields, seemingly forever only to return unscathed a full year later; how her dad used to get her to go and buy a packet of cigarettes for him through the stable-type side door of the Red Lion for payment of a packet of crisps (different times!) and not least the following "Tale of the Welsh dresser".

At some point during the 1960s this piece of furniture had been donated by the then landlady of the Red Lion, a Mrs Bishop, to my wife's family along with a Victorian washstand with jug and basin. My wife's parents decided to adorn the dresser with, amongst other things, a brass toasting fork. However, any chance the dresser had of lasting to become a beloved family heirloom soon disappeared when the toasting fork was seen to swing from side to side of its own (or some other unseen entity's) volition! During my wife's singular experience of this phenomenon she witnessed her father physically stop the fork swinging by grabbing it with both hands, only for it to immediately start swinging again. We don't know how often this took place, but certainly on this occasion her father's conviction of its otherworldly nature was sufficient for him to drag the dresser into the garden, chop it up and burn it! On another occasion the jug of the washstand mysteriously fell to the ground and smashed when no one was in the room.

Already spooked by these stories (a feeling that wasn't helped by the historic nature of our surroundings; for example, Bierton also has a Gib (as in gibbet) Lane which was the site of the last public execution in Buckinghamshire!), *someone* decided it would be a good idea to have lunch in the Red Lion. During our meal the inevitable happened: I needed to pee. I was in total meltdown; that would mean leaving the security of my family and daring to go out into the wider pub, ducking below the ancient beams and walking alone into the stark corridor to the Gents' toilet whilst being followed by whatever inquisitive spirits still resided in the fabric of the building! Anyway, I had to go, so off I went with a chill down my spine and not daring to look over my shoulder. There I was, standing alone amongst the cold tiles of the Gents at the old-fashioned wall-to-wall urinal wanting to get things over with as quickly as possible when out of nowhere came this terrifying PAAH!! sound aimed in my direction. I was out of there! Zipping myself up as quickly as I could, my nerves shattered, I turned to see the source of my terror looming over me, in the corner, above the door….an automatically dispensing air freshener!

Philip Warr
Manchester

Mothman returns?

Regarding the article on the Hythe Moth man [**FT439:28-33**]; I spent many childhood holidays on Romney Marsh, Kent, where Hythe is situated, and when I was seven years old in summer 1984, my family and I were sitting in a pub garden at about dusk, and we all witnessed a large owl-like creature that flew over the beer garden – much to our surprise and shock. Many of the witnesses, who knew the local flora and fora, were absolutely adamant that it was not a barn owl or anything of the like, as it was simply too large. Perhaps we had witnessed the re-emergence of the Hythe Mothman 20 years on, only this time at New Romney?

Phil Brand
London

LETTERS

Continued from p.61

However, as a fallen angel/second-tier supernatural being cannot "create" nor can they "force" a human's actions. Satan, as the fount of all that is vile and evil, can only deceive, entice, or force-with-menaces the actions of a human. To use a basic analogy, Satan can induce the human to punch themselves in the face, but they can't *make* the human do so.

Thus, an argument can be made that the contract (*in re* the soul for heart's desire) is an enticement to submit one's Ka/Spirit Essence – the human is giving away something by falling for a deception and, ultimately, this is coercion; the 'victim' desires an outcome which Satan declares they will supply, "If only you'll give me your soul." In case law: this is offering $1M in gold for the access to your bank account. No one forces the person to give their access codes.

In short, Satan is obtaining the everlasting spirit by deception. *Technically*, the human is only willing to 'sell' their soul under certain conditions that are outlined by the Great Deceiver. Merely sounding out Shaitan for negotiations over their Ka is *not* a rejection of God. It is that the human, a fallible entity as all must agree, has been tricked into *considering* the rejection of Divine Grace. Upon signing the contract then all is done, of course.

Alan Cassady-Bishop
Bridlington, Yorkshire

Dead (Trump) Zone

The assassination attempt on Donald Trump made me think of one thing: the film *The Dead Zone*. The 1983 film is based on a Stephen King novel and directed by David Cronenberg. It's been many years since I saw the film, and the details were hazy, but I remembered the basic plot and an assassination attempt at the end, although I had totally forgotten how the story unfolded. Here's a basic synopsis of the film – major spoilers ahead (but it's over 40 years old).

The main character, Johnny (Christopher Walken), is involved in a car crash with a milk lorry on his way home from his girlfriend's house on a wet evening. He wakes up in a hospital bed to find he has been in a coma for five years. He then realises that when he touches people, he has visions. These visions are of either the future (precognition) or the past (retrocognition) of the individual he touches. After he prevents a young boy from falling through some ice, Johnny realises he can change the future. This leads us to the plotline with Greg Stillswon (Martin Sheen), an up-and-coming populist politician campaigning to become a senator. His speech style and appeals to the common American, with his right-wing 'America first' approach, seem very familiar, even down to wearing a white helmet at one of his rallies. At one rally, Johnny shakes Stillson's hand and gets a vision of him as President launching nuclear weapons and starting World War III. After this, Johnny decides Stillson must die to save millions and attempts to assassinate him at another rally (again, familiar?). However, to shield himself, Stillson holds up a baby and is photographed by the press. Johnny is shot, and while he is dying, Stillson grabs hold of him and Johnny has another vision of a disgraced Stillson committing suicide. My question was, had Stephen King predicted the assassination attempt on Trump?

As with most of my ideas, someone had beaten me to it, with interviews with King, Cronenberg, and Sheen about the similarity between Trump and Stillson and various articles commenting on the similarity of their rise to power. Following the assassination attempt posters on Reddit and even Mumsnet commented that they had thought of the film when hearing about the event, just as I had, and had already made the *Dead Zone*-Trump link. After the initial recognition, my first job was to go back and watch the film. After a good 20 years, I had forgotten huge chunks of it. For one thing, I had misremembered the ending. I thought Stillson was assassinated at the end. This is a different outcome from both the film and the events surrounding Trump, which in itself is interesting. Had I Mandela Effected myself? The story's 'Dead Zone' is the possibility of changing the future. This poses some interesting questions surrounding precognition and how it theoretically could work.

Ultimately, the film is about clairvoyance and its two forms: retrocognition (information from the past) and precognition (information for the future). In other words, clairvoyance is gaining information about the past or future but not by the traditional senses. King could have been using precognition to write his story about precognition. In his story, the future is not fixed, and it can be changed. But are we living in a predetermined universe, or can we change things? Or maybe the 'changed' future would always happen, and we have not actually changed anything. The paradox is that we can never prove a change has occurred, as the event that was originally seen was changed and, therefore, never happened. It could have more to do with parallel universes. With every decision, a new universe is created, and precognition is just showing us possible futures. But again, this brings the paradox of not being able to 'prove' the precognition is a future event.

Parallels between Trump and Stillson had already been noted, but do the recent events extend from parallel characters to parallel events? A lone gunman at a rally, and an assassination attempt. Again, the parallels are striking, but in reality, it's probably not that different from every other assassination attempt; or is it? Assassination attempts on politicians at rallies are a rare event. In *The Dead Zone*, the attempt leads to Stillson holding up the baby as a shield, and this being photographed and ending his career, ultimately leading to his suicide (thus, of course, preventing nuclear war). The attempt on Trump, arguably went the other way, and made him more popular, for a very short period anyway. The similarities surround the Trump-Stillson element rather than the assassin himself.

Did Stephen King predict Trump? Was his version a wishful thought about his downfall? Or a prediction about a different, parallel universe? It was probably a coincidence, but it made me think about another point. Should I even be writing about this, putting yet another conspiracy-type theory out there, and then, in turn, making it real (as in the *Department of Truth* graphic novel)? You could just as easily use the films *The Omen 3* and *Damien Thorne* (and probably countless others) to predict any rising political figure, although perhaps the starkness of the character of Greg Stillson made it stick in my and others' mind. Or maybe Stephen King has ESP.

Dr Malcolm Schofield
University of Derby

Familiar trick

The balancing water bottle in Ghostwatch [**FT438:18**] is a trick well known to conjurers. Here is a photo of my own examples, using a coffee jar and a pint glass of water. I'm not going to reveal the secret, but I can assure you no camera trickery was involved.

Tim Allen, *Brecon, Powys, Wales*

PECULIAR POSTCARDS

JAN BONDESON shares another deltiological discovery from his prodigious collection of postcards. This month's pictorial blast from the past recounts the touching story of Parisian ecccentric Monsieur Pol and his feathered friends

50. THE BIRD-MAN OF THE TUILERIES

Monsieur Henri Pol was born in the Department of the Somme some time in the 1830s. In 1857, he was employed as a clerk by the French telegraphic service at their office at the Rue de Grenelle in Paris; fast forward 40 years, and he was still there, now a rather dotty bachelor in his sixties, busy at his duties in the telegraph office. His prime amusement in life was to take a stroll in the Tuileries gardens during his lunch break, to read the newspaper and to feed the sparrows with breadcrumbs. It soon struck him that the sparrows had been done a great injustice by the naturalists: these humble Parisian birds were in fact highly intelligent. When M. Pol gave his favourite birds names, they soon learnt to answer to them. A little hen sparrow named Jeanette was taught to perch on M Pol's hand and take breadcrumbs from his mouth. When M Pol met a friend, she politely came flying up to be introduced to him. Another sparrow, named Nicolas, after the Tsar of Russia, used to pick M Pol out in the Rue de Rivoli when he was approaching the gardens, making use of his superior intelligence to deduce exactly when the ornithophilic Frenchman was due to arrive. Yet another sparrow, named 'Le Petit Boer' during the Boer War, only answered M Pol's call when he spoke English; his enemy was a sparrow named 'Chamberlain' who was fond of fighting not only 'Le Petit Boer' but all the other sparrows as well.

When M Pol retired from the telegraph office around the turn of the century, he took up permanent residence in the Tuileries gardens, to the delight of his feathered friends. He became known as 'Le Charmeur

ABOVE: Monsieur Pol and his feathered friends in the Tuileries, a postcard stamped and posted in 1909. **BELOW**: The Bird-man on the cover of *Le Petit Journal* in 1911.

d'Oiseaux au Jardin des Tuileries', fed his sparrows and pigeons several hearty meals each day, and sold postcards to his human admirers, adorned by doggerel poems of his own composition, of which the following is a fair example:

A ma voix les moineaux
s'approchent pleins d'audace
Et viennent au banquet se
disputer la place:
Tous les amis sont là!
Ferdinand le Noceur,
Joanette, Robinet et Joseph le
Danceur!

> *These humble birds were in fact highly intelligent*

More than once, the Bird-man of the Tuileries was depicted in the illustrated Paris weeklies, as one of the eccentric inhabitants of Paris. In 1912, his eyesight began to fail, and when he went to see an oculist, the diagnosis was cataracts. After an operation, the Bird-man regained his eyesight, and resumed his duties at the Tuileries, delighting that his favourite birds had not forgotten him. In 1914, he was still caring for them in the early wartime gloom, telling a *New York Herald* correspondent that since the birds of Paris were unhappy enough already, and fearful of the Germans seizing control of their beloved gardens, he was very much needed to keep them in good cheer. The Bird-man struggled on throughout the bitter war years, but in 1918, when he was in his eighties, he was separated from his beloved birds when he became an inpatient at an old people's institution at Chardon-Lagache. He expired not long after, and was buried in the cemetery at Bagneux. His postcards must have enjoyed healthy sales, since they are by no means rare, and easy to come by in the Parisian Marché aux Puces.

Fortean Traveller

144. Zeeland

ULRICH MAGIN heads to the southwest of the Netherlands to visit the country's least populous province, home to all sorts of historical and archæological curiosities as well as various fortean phenomena – including one of Europe's strangest ever contactee cases...

Broadly speaking, the Dutch province of Zeeland consists of islands and peninsulas that make up the delta of three rivers – the Rhine, the Maas and the Scheldt. This is old country, in contrast to many other areas of the Netherlands which are below sea level, and it is a region full of mysterious places. It may even house a submarine UFO base!

I have mainly visited the islands of Walcheren and Schouwen, but they offer Zeeland in a nutshell and have enough strange sights to keep the curious traveller busy; but not every mysterious place looks like one, and some which do look very mysterious are not. Take, for example, the sacrificial stone, an alleged dolmen capstone with a cup and blood gutter. Local historian CA Rethaan Macaré of Middelburg published a paper in 1859 describing "Eene heidensche offerplaats op Walcheren" ("a heathen sacrificial site in Walcheren"); he believed he had discovered a Germanic or Druidic altar. Today, the small stone sits to the left of Serooskerke church tower and modern archæologists think it's simply an erratic boulder.[1]

A flavour of Atlantis and sunken lands is suggested by another stone slab, this time an authentic antiquity, which is now exhibited at the tourist information office on Domburg. It hints at a Roman temple, now lost in the sea or below the dunes. It was revealed by heavy storms on 5 January 1647 that displaced several dunes off Domburg. When the water was low, the residents discovered 45 pieces of pillars, altars and statues, some bearing inscriptions and others with sculptures. These showed that what they had found was the remains of a temple to the goddess Nehalennia. Most of the discoveries were later lost, but in the autumn of 1870 another storm uncovered the altar on the beach – which you can still see today.[2]

Also close to Domburg is a mediæval holy well. It is now housed in a kind of short, round tower between the coast and the church of Zoutelande. It was created by the missionary Willibrordus in 690 when he rammed a cross into the ground, which made the water well up. He may have come here because of the temple of Nehalennia. He certainly made good use of it in christening the pagans. The well house is a recent structure,

TOP: Map of Zeeland by Abraham Ortelius 1592. **ABOVE LEFT:** The "sacrificial stone" of Serooskerke. **LEFT:** The mediæval holy well in Zoutelande created by Willibrodus in 690 and now housed in a modern structure.

PHOTOS: ULRICH MAGIN

ABOVE LEFT: The ninth century fortification of Souburg, here playing host to a horse fair. **ABOVE RIGHT:** The mottes of Zeeland look more archaic than they are. **BELOW:** The Westkapelle Fluchthügel, one of many semi-spherical, man-made mounds of earth that dot the landscape of Walcheren.

built in 1981, and the whole site is a replacement for the original spring, which was destroyed when the dykes were enlarged in 1958.

After the missionary came the Vikings in the final quarter of the ninth century, and against them the rulers of the region constructed five castles, similar to the circular fortifications found in Viking Denmark, the so-called *Trelleborgen*. Three seem to have disappeared beneath modern towns and cities, which are said to preserve the ground plan in their streets – in Middelburg and Domburg on Walcheren and in Oostburg on the western side of the Scheldt – but two are excellently preserved (or, rather, reconstructed). One can be found at Burgh on the island of Schouwen-Duiveland, where a village sits in the ancient earthwork, much like Avebury, and in Oost-Souburg on Walcheren. When I visited the site in September, a horse fair and ancient horse games were taking place in it, which added much colour. The walls are man-high, completely and perfectly circular, and four main roads form a cross-shape inside. When they were restored, one of the gates was also rebuilt. [3]

Another example of the region's mediæval heritage are the monumental artificial hills, called *vliedbergen* or *bergjes* ('escape hills', 'refuge mounds' or 'tiny hills'). These are perfectly preserved examples of motte-and-bailey, early forms of timber castle, which here date from the 11th to the 13th

He believed he had discovered a German or Druidic altar

century. There are so many of them – about 40 on Walcheren alone, and all of significant size – that you can hardly miss them when you walk or cycle the back roads. The low country between Westkapelle and Domburg is dotted with these perfect semi-spherical, artificial humps of earth, which look like Maeshowe replicas. I recall reading on an explanation board that these were just humps of earth on which the sheep and cattle could flee when flooding affected the area, but all the literature points to the castle explanation. [4]

To the north of Walcheren lies the island of Schouwen-Duiveland, and both islands are connected by the gigantic dykes, dams and locks of the Delta Works, constructed between 1954 and 1997 to shorten the coastline and seal off the delta of the three mighty rivers in case of storms and floods.

The main settlement on the island is Zierikzee, a beautiful mediæval and renaissance town as any to be found in the Netherlands. The sight to see is the *Monstertoren* ('minster tower') of St Lievens Church, today a mere stump. As the rest of the church collapsed following a fire in 1843, the tower stands isolated today – and as a result looks simply enormous. The building of the church, planned by the architect Andries Keldermans of Mechelen, began in 1454, and just laying the foundations for the tower in the weak ground took 25 years. The footprint of the tower measures 16m^2 (or 25m^2 when the buttresses are included) and the structure had been intended to reach a height of 435ft (132m). The builders, however, only managed to reach 200ft (61m) before the money ran out, but this is still

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JOHAN BAKKER

ABOVE LEFT: The mermaid of Schouwen sits in a roundabout from which you can make your way to the sea. **ABOVE RIGHT:** The old port at Zierikzee. **BELOW:** The *Monstertoren* or minster tower, standing alone after the collapse of the rest of the church, of Zierikzee is an impressive sight.

impressive. (The world's largest steeple is that of Ulm Cathedral in Germany, with a height of 160m (530ft), which was finished in 1890.)

So, there is much of archæological and historical interest to see in the province, and, what's more, there are also some fascinating records of fortean events. The earliest I am aware of is the amazing sight enjoyed by skipper pilot Ewoudt Anszoon Droouwert at 9am on 21 December 1651, when he was 12 miles (19km) off the mouth of the Maas in the company of two other men. They all saw "at a man's height from the horizon" a full troop of cavalry and infantry marching in from the northeast, dressed for war. [5]

In July 1965, Stefan Denaerde claimed he made contact with people from the planet Iarga while he was sailing off Burghsluis in the Eastern Scheldt and collided with a submerged saucer. He first saw a searchlight, and then his boat ran against something beneath the water. He recognised a body floating in the sea, and rescued an alien in a space suit. The searchlight from the underwater saucer hit him, and a 1.4m (4.6ft) tall dwarf approached him from the USO (Unidentified Submerged Object).

Communication in broken English followed, and Denaerde learned that the space visitors from Iarga were far advanced of humans, but avoided contact with mankind because we were not yet ready for it. However, they were willing to make an exception of Denaerde whom they told everything about their home 10 light years from Earth, as well as the truth about Jesus and the Antichrist. [6]

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I have strolled along this stretch of coast several times, but have never been lucky enough to see a USO or meet an alien.

No sea-serpents have been spotted in Zeeland – their haunt tends to be the North Holland coast – but there is no lack of other queer beasts, known and unknown, in the seas and rivers of the region. Henry Lee, sea-monster debunker of the 19th century, once spotted a mermaid in the delta, which proved to be a seal, and the German scientist Schlegel noticed a sea-serpent in the mouth of the Rhine, which dissolved into a row of porpoises.

But there is, at least, a monument to a mermaid that you can visit. It is on Schouwen, on a roundabout in the village of Westenschouwen, a fishing town in the mouth of the Scheldt. Westenschouwen was one of the main mediæval harbours in the Netherlands until it silted up around 1500. Legend blames a mermaid, and local fishermen are supposed to have netted the creature – presumably some time before the loss of the harbour – and carried her into port. A merman swam after them and pleaded for the mermaid's freedom, begging for her to be released, but the brutal fishermen only laughed. They did not benefit from their catch, as she soon died, still on the pier.

This did not please the merman, grieving for his lost wife: "Westenschouwen, you will regret you stole my wife. Westenschouwen will go down, only the tower will survive," he swore. And in fact the only trace of the mediæval village was a mighty tower that stood among the dunes until it was demolished in 1845.

The area's close connection to the sea makes the mermaid and the merman a perfect symbol for

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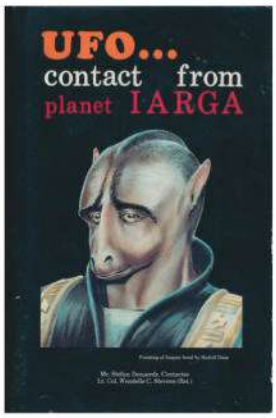
ABOVE LEFT: These two very strange seals decorate a wall in the seaside town of Zouterlande. **ABOVE RIGHT**: UFO contactee Stefan Denaerde (left) with co-author Lt Col Wendelle C Stevens. **BELOW**: Their book, *UFO Contact from Planet Iarga*, detailed Denaerde's encounter with a submerged flying saucer and its occupants.

marine trade, and I have seen sculpted mermaids decorating houses and official buildings in Middelburg, Zierikzee and elsewhere. It is interesting to note that Denaerde's marine aliens appeared just at the place where mermaids were once reported.

Regarding sea-monsters, and not including the whale strandings that happen at regular intervals in the province, there is the strange case of the Ostende monster of 1801. Ostende is just to the west of Zeeland, across the border with Belgium. The report hints at some allegory, or else was something marine very decomposed or bizarre. I do not know what paper the clipping I have comes from, but it references an article from the *Hamburg Gazette* which I have been unable to locate:

"The following account of a singular animal is extracted from a letter, dated the 10th of April, inserted in the Hamburg Gazette!!!! – 'On the morning of the 8th an amphibious animal, shaped like a horse, nearly nine feet [2.7m] high, and of a proportionate length, with a long tail, a skin impenetrable to a musket ball, and two fins, as sharp as the finest steel, came on shore near Ostend. His appearance spread the most dreadful panic throughout the country, and every one fled before him. Some musket balls which were fired at him proved fruitless although they struck his body, and he ravaged the plains with impunity. Of a flock of sheep that fell in his way, he devoured no less than 20 with a voracity greater than that of the most ferocious tiger. After the most sanguinary depredations, he retired, and plunged into the sea. The inhabitants, apprehensive of his visiting them the next day, prepared for his reception and 30 of them, the bravest and most skilful marksmen, were selected to stop his furious career. He accordingly made his appearance, and being attacked and shot in the ear, he was at length taken in a net.'"



This may have been an April Fool's joke, or else some political satire on Napoleon (who had conquered Ostende in 1798), or perhaps it was a genuine account of a still unidentified sea creature.

At least I located two very strange seals, looking like a cross between ordinary seals and plesiosaurs, depicted on tiles on a house in Duinweg 37, Zoutelande. They were accompanied by a pair of similarly unconventional porpoises, so I will chalk this up to artistic licence rather than claiming a zoological discovery!

Strange strandings there certainly are. On 17 July 1777, a great beast was taken alive in the sea off Domburg by fishermen. At first they thought it was a buoy, and then an overturned boat, but when they approached it proved to be an enormous turtle. They judged its length to be around 5ft 4in. [7] This was, without doubt, a large leatherback turtle.

Anyone who wants to see real sea mammals is best served in the Westerschelde and the Oosterschelde, where seals are a common sight. Whale watching trips can be booked in Burghsluis and porpoises are said to play at the breakwater of Zierikzee (I was not lucky enough too see any).

The region was of great importance during World War II, and one can find many large German bunkers along the coast. The Dutch Bunker Museum is located at Zoutelande; here, visitors can see two bunkers of the German Lohengrin base. Several memorials remind you of the battle of the Scheldt in November 1944.

Despite this dark history, the region is flooded by German tourists. Food, as in many a tourist hotspot, is average, and the seaside towns cater mainly for day trippers. Chips are served, and these are in the good Belgian tradition and very tasty. Prices can be steep, but sit in one of the beach cafés and try the famous local pancakes. You will have no problem asking for directions: the Dutch all speak English and German as if these were their mother tongue.

NOTES

1 Jan JB Kuipers, Robbert Jan Swiers, *Het verhaal van Zeeland*, Uitgeverij Verloren, 2005 p.235.

2 Paul Herrmann, *Deutsche Mythologie in gemeinverständlicher Darstellung*, Leipzig: Verlag von Wilhelm Engelmann, 1906, p.288; Otto Schrader, *Reallexikon der indogermanischen Altertumskunde*, KJ Trübner, 1929, vol 2, p.300..

3 awww.vvvzeeland.nl/de/inseln/walcheren/doerfer-und-staedte/oost-souburg/

4 RM Van Heeringen, "Duizend jaar oude bergen aan de Zeeuwse kust", *Historisch-Geografisch Tijdschrift* 25, 2007, pp.97-107.

5 Simon Schama, *The Embarrassment of Riches*, Vintage, 1997, p.148.

6 Adolf Schneider, *Besucher aus dem All, Bauer*, Freiburg im Breisgau, 1973, pp.336-337; Michael Hesemann, *UFOs, die Kontakte*, Self-published, 1998, p 161.

7 LD Brongersma, "European Atlantic Turtles", *Zoologische Verhandelingen* 121, 1972, pp.64-65.

And a thankyou goes to Richard Muirhead for the clipping about the Ostende monster.

ULRICH MAGIN is a veteran fortean researcher and author, a longtime contributor to FT and the compiler of our regular 'Strange Continent' column. He lives in Germany.

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FORTEAN TIMES is a monthly magazine of news, reviews and research on strange phenomena and experiences, curiosities, prodigies and portents. It was founded by Bob Rickard in 1973 to continue the work of Charles Fort (1874–1932).

Born of Dutch stock in Albany, New York, Fort spent many years researching scientific literature in the New York Public Library and the British Museum Library. He marshalled his evidence and set forth his philosophy in *The Book of the Damned* (1919), *New Lands* (1923), *Lo!* (1931), and *Wild Talents* (1932).

He was sceptical of dogmatic scientific explanations, observing that some scientists tended to argue according to their personal beliefs rather than the rules of evidence and that inconvenient data were ignored, suppressed, discredited or explained away. He criticised modern science for its reductionism, its attempts to define, divide and separate. Fort's dictum "One measures a circle beginning anywhere" expresses instead his philosophy of Continuity in which everything is in an intermediate and transient state between extremes.

He had ideas of the Universe-as-organism and the transient nature of all apparent phenomena, coined the term 'teleportation', and was perhaps the first to speculate that mysterious lights seen in the sky might be craft from outer space. However, he cut at the very roots of credulity: "I conceive of nothing, in religion, science or philosophy, that is more than the proper thing to wear, for a while."

Fort was by no means the first person to collect anomalies and oddities – such collections have abounded from Greece to China since ancient times. **Fortean Times** keeps alive this ancient task of dispassionate weird-watching, exploring the wild frontiers between the known and the unknown.

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GULLY BULL'S CABINET OF CURIOSITIES -①

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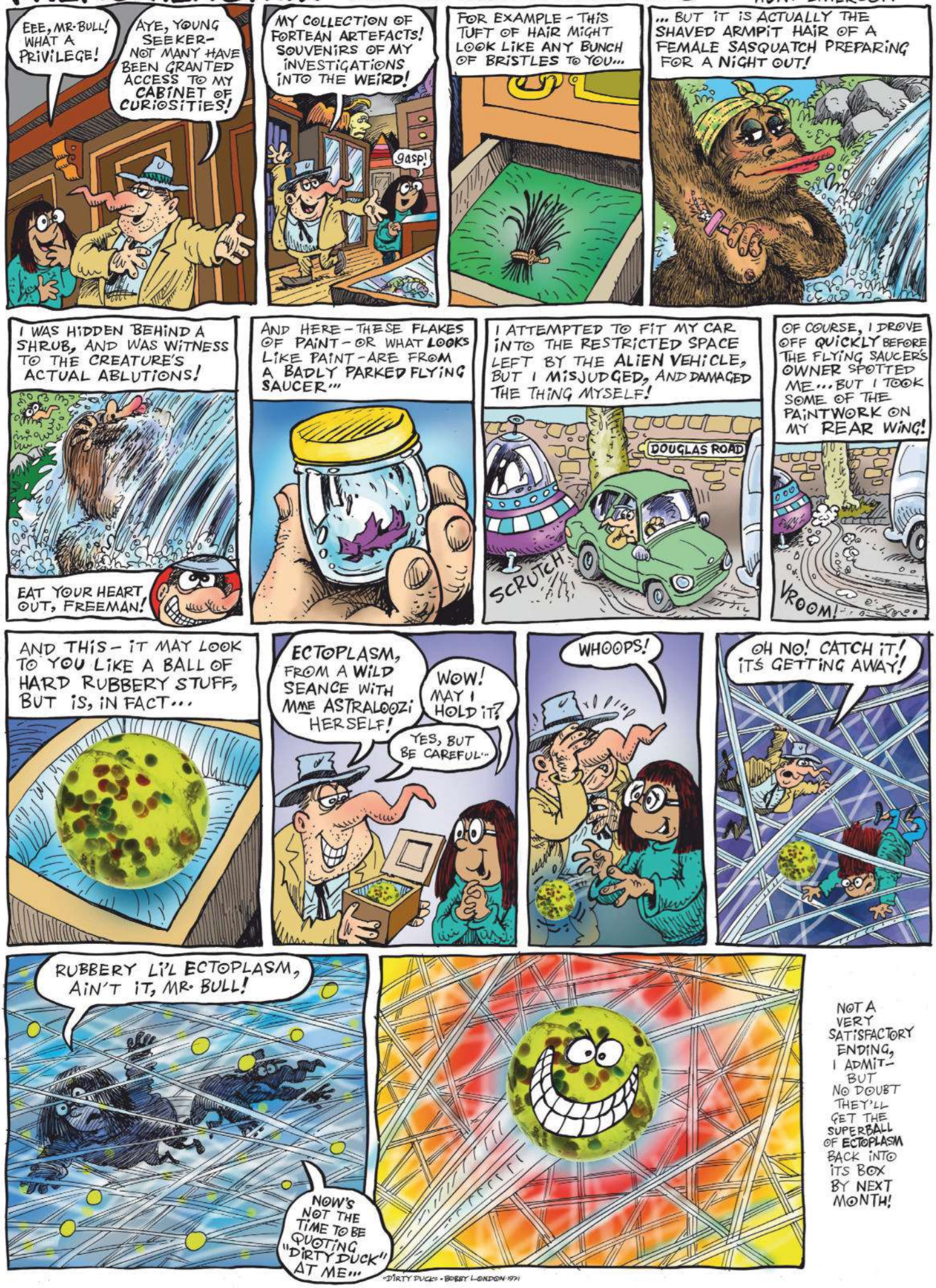

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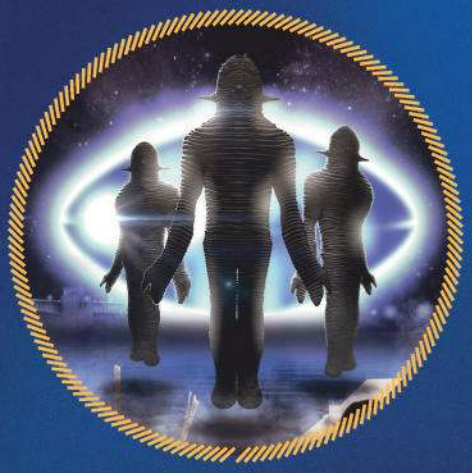

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FORTEAN TIMES 455

ON SALE 20 FEB 2025

STRANGE DEATHS

UNUSUAL WAYS OF SHUFFLING OFF THIS MORTAL COIL

The chimpanzees of the Nimba Mountains Nature Reserve in Guinea have become world famous for using stone hammers and anvils to crack open nuts, something no other chimp community has been seen doing. However, as Seny Zogba was working in a cassava field in nearby Bossou, one of the reserve's chimps attacked her, biting her badly and making off with her eight-month-old baby, named as Yoh Hélène, who was wrenched from Zogba's arms. Villagers gave chase, but could not catch up with the chimp, and shortly afterwards Yoh Hélène's mutilated body was found 3km (1.9 miles) away. She had been killed, disembowelled and partly eaten by at least one chimpanzee. Scientists at the reserve's research centre say that they had recorded six attacks on humans by chimpanzees in the area this year alone, with chief researcher Gen Yamakoshi adding that it wasn't clear whether the attacks are because of food or "excitement", although he felt that the chimps "no longer fear humans". Locals had no doubt as to the reason for the killing, blaming researchers for habituating the chimps to the presence of people. They took the child's corpse to the research centre to confront scientists, then ransacked the building, destroying and setting fire to equipment including drones, computers and over 200 documents, with Joseph Doré, a villager from Bossou, saying "it's the way she was killed, that's what angered the population." *dailymail.co.uk, 26 Sept 2024.*

Encouraged by his father, a 20-year-old man named only as Shivaraj, a professional snake catcher from the Kamareddy district of Telangana, India, filmed a stunt intended for distribution via WhatsApp to boost his standing on social media. All did not go to plan. In his video, Shivaraj can be seen standing in the middle of a road holding an extremely venomous cobra. He puts the head of the snake in his mouth, holding it in place with his teeth, looks at the camera with his arms folded, then runs his hands through his hair. All the while the trapped cobra can be seen thrashing and trying to escape. At the end of the video, Shivaraj again turns to the camera and gives a thumbs-up, with the snake's head still in his mouth. Once filmed, the video was immediately distributed to Shivaraj's WhatsApp groups, but afterwards he collapsed and died, the snake having bitten him multiple times in his mouth while he held it trapped there. ***hindustantimes.com, 7 Sept 2024.***

In order to rummage in the storage section of her ottoman bed, Helen Davey, 39, lifted up the mattress platform and leaned over the base. Ottoman beds have springs or pistons which allow the top of the bed to hinge upwards, giving access to a storage space underneath. These are meant to support the weight of the mattress, which should only come down when pulled back into place. Davey's bed, though, had a faulty gas piston, and, as a result, it unexpectedly collapsed on her, trapping her neck between the platform and the edge of the base. She was unable to lift the heavy mattress platform and couldn't call for help, so was slowly asphyxiated by its weight. She was only discovered some time later by her daughter Elizabeth, 19, by which time Davey was dead. *telegraph.co.uk, 13 Oct 2024.*

A huge rabid brown bear broke into a dog shelter in Luchegorsk, Russia, and massacred the 35 stray dogs chained up in the building before smashing its way into the nearby home of an 87-year-old man and his son, 56, and mauling both of them to death before fleeing into the forest. A curfew was imposed in the area and official hunters were called in to track the beast down, eventually cornering the bear and shooting it. In India, another rabid bear killed Mukesh Thakur, 50, and his wife, Indira, 45, in the Panna Tiger Reserve, then spent five hours devouring their remains before Reserve rangers could reach the scene. They tranquilised the bear, which later tested positive for rabies and died. ***Saturday Telegraph (Sydney), 29 Sept 2024; The Free Press and Journal, 12 Jun 2022.***

Police in Sydney, Australia, are not treating the death of Janet James as suspicious, although they initially suspected foul play. James, 47, had gone missing from the address in Wahroonga where she had been staying after friends said she started "behaving strangely". When James was discovered dead in a nearby creek by a local rugby coach out on a hike, all her clothes were on backwards and her body was covered in unexplained grazes. *D.Telegraph (Sydney), 20 Jul 2022.*

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